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**THE POSTCOLONIAL LESBIAN TEXT:
READINGS OF FOUR NOVELS BY RENÉE**

A Thesis

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of the requirements of the Degree of

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©

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the question: “How might a text, written in a signifying relationship to the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand, be read as a lesbian text?” Part One addresses the possibility of the reading postcolonial lesbian text in four novels by Renée. It begins with an overview of humanist and poststructuralist reading and writing strategies which are contested within a contemporary Western lesbian literary field. At an intersection of poststructuralist and postcolonial debates I identify the potential for a queer reading strategy to disrupt lesbian humanist discourses by bringing the term lesbian into a textual relationship with the categories of (at least) sex, gender, sexuality, race and class.

Also in Part One, I locate the four novels by Renée in the context of a New Zealand lesbian literature which is not widely recognised. I demonstrate how the hostile reception of four novels by Renée has been characterised by a colonialist discourse which manifests as the vestiges of a colonialist literary aesthetic operating in a contemporary culture sphere. Part One also outlines the strategy I have developed for reading the four novels by Renée. This strategy was originally formulated by Roland Barthes for rereading the classic text. The classic textual model is located within a Western humanist system of representation, the cornerstone of which is the Western humanist subject. Firstly, I adapt Barthes’s strategy to a rereading of three short colonialist texts, texts which promote a relationship of agreement with the reader as to the cultural and symbolic authority of the British Empire. This rereading strategy makes it possible to read the

privileged Western humanist subject as always and already sexed-gendered-sexualised-classed-raced variously male-masculine-hetero-bourgeoisie-white. Barthes also offers a strategy for reading the writerly text. In contrast with the classic text, the writerly text positions the reader as a producer rather than as a consumer of the text.

Secondly, in Part Two I demonstrate how a queer reading strategy can be productively applied to texts written in signifying relationships to a postcolonial context. In my reading of the four novels by Renée I demonstrate how each is characterised by a writerly approach to the constitution of colonialist subjectivities, these writerly texts being unlike classic colonialist texts in that they foreground the traces of cultural and symbolic inscription in colonialist discourses. I demonstrate, for example, how in the writerly text of each of the four novels the British Empire is connotatively signified in relation to family, home and nation in colonialist discourses. In each of the four novels, lesbian and other queer subjectivities are also discursively reconstituted in signifying relationships to colonialist texts of family, home, nation and empire. I demonstrate how, in relation to signifying imperatives of colonialist discourses, the novels are characterised by a postcolonial textuality which manifests the symbolic and cultural authority of the British Empire. It is my thesis that the four novels by Renée are writerly texts which foreground the traces of an earlier British textual imperialism operating in the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand. My queer reading of four novels by Renée also makes manifest the postcolonial lesbian text.

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INTRODUCTION

The Postcolonial Lesbian Text: Readings Of Four Novels By Renée, addresses the question: “How might a text, written in a signifying relationship to the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand, be read as a lesbian text?”¹ This question signals the “imperial route” I have taken in the lead up to my readings of the four novels.² Such a route has been taken for two reasons, the first of which is that each of these four novels is written in a signifying relationship to a nation with a history of colonisation linked to British Imperialism beginning in the eighteenth century.

Houston A. Baker asks: “How can we know precisely when a culture has departed the colonial moment to become ... what? A postcolony?”³ The answer is, we don’t. In this thesis, the term ‘postcolonial’ designates a time-period of history which, in the case of Aotearoa New Zealand is generally considered to be from 1948 when New Zealand achieved Dominion status and became legally independent. In this thesis, the term ‘postcolonial’ is also intended to reflect a recognition of a continued, post-independence colonial presence.⁴

¹ These novels are *Willy Nilly: A Novel* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1990), *Daisy and Lily: A Novel* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1993), *Does This Make Sense To You?* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1995), *The Snowball Waltz*. (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1997).

² Ann Laura Stoler, *Race And The Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality And The Colonial Order Of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) 7.

³ Houston A. Baker Jr., “Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition,” letter, *PMLA Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 110.5 (1995): 1047.

⁴ Other critical practitioners make a more visible distinction between pre- and post-independence contexts as does Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) when she points out that the hyphenated term post-colonial in Western contexts generally “designates the post-Second World War era” 3. I have

In this thesis I argue that while, arguably, the most palpable colonisation that has taken place in the context of British Imperialism is the forcible confiscation of land and other resources from indigenous populations, even such an extreme form of colonisation is also intrinsically “a textual undertaking.”⁵ It is not, however, my intention to frame my thesis in a way that suggests that colonisation is ever only a discursive or textual practice. It is my belief that imperialist and colonialist discourses are also materialised in their multiple operations and effects. Throughout the thesis I use the term ‘colonialist discourse,’ rather than the more benign term ‘colonial discourse,’ to designate both textual and material effects of colonisation. This being the case, I argue that British Imperialism is always already discursive in a multiplicity of operations and effects, and that such colonisation is always already an effect of discourses which invest British imperialist cultural and symbolic authority in colonialist subjects. These in turn signify and effect a culturally and morally superior British Empire manifested in the subject positions ‘colonised’ and ‘coloniser.’

The discursive deconstitution of these subject positions in colonialist discourses is a labour I undertake in this thesis. My references to ‘the colonialist nation New Zealand’ signify the nation and its subjects as they are represented in colonialist discourses. The designation ‘the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand’ refers to that nation both discursively and materially colonized, and to the discursive

retained this usage and other idiosyncratic usages of this term by other theorists only when they have been directly quoted.

⁵ Boehmer 5.

reconstitution of a range of colonialist subjectivities in the post-independence context.

Throughout this thesis the term ‘colonialist discourse’ is intended to mean that which “embraces all kinds of discursive production related to and arising out of colonial situations.”⁶ It applies principally to signifying practices which embody an implicit British cultural and moral superiority. However, these same signifying practices also manifest, for example, a colonialist literature which embodies “the imperialists’ point of view.”⁷ The constitution of colonialist literature, as an effect of British cultural and symbolic imperialism, is also implicated in the constitution of a colonialist literary aesthetic; that being the second reason I have taken an imperial route in the lead up to my reading of four novels by Renée.

One such operation and effect of a colonialist literary aesthetic has been “to conceal the tremendous diversities among [and within] the colonies.”⁸ Evidence of this discursive colonising effect is displayed in the way these novels have been received, in general, by a New Zealand reviewing community invested in a colonialist literary aesthetic which manifests as a certain antipathy towards both Renée and towards the way she depicts New Zealanders and New Zealand culture. In her four novels Renée sets a diverse range of characters, including Maori and

⁶ Walter D. Mignolo, “Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse: Cultural Critique or Academic Colonialism?” *Latin American Research Review* 28.3 (1993) 124.

⁷ Boehmer 3.

⁸ Shirley Chew and Anna Rutherford, eds., preface, *Unbecoming Daughters of the Empire* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1993) 3. See also Boehmer who notes a tendency “to stress the similarity of texts written in the former colonies of the British Empire, at the expense of recognizing their differences” 4.

Pakeha lesbian characters, in the context of culturally and politically interactive communities, mainly in the period from the 1960s through to the end of the 1990s.⁹ These contexts include protest actions surrounding the annual Treaty of Waitangi commemorations and the Springbok rugby tour of 1981.¹⁰

In their literary representation of diverse and culturally and politically interactive postcolonial New Zealand communities, these novels may also be considered to be part of a postcolonial New Zealand literature which “critically scrutinizes the colonial relationship.”¹¹ This possibility has not been recognised by the New Zealand reviewing community. Renée’s novels have, however, been read by some reviewers as unrepresentative of New Zealand literature *per se*. The New Zealand reviewing community has also displayed a glaring oversight of the possibility that exists for reading these novels as part of a New Zealand lesbian literature. It is my contention that some reviewers’ responses to the four novels reflect a wider colonialist cultural politics operating on the production, dissemination, critical

⁹ Ralph Crane, “Out of the Center: Thoughts on the Post-colonial Literatures of Australia and New Zealand,” *English Postcoloniality Literatures from Around the World*, eds. Radhika Mohanram and Gita Rajan (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996) discerns a “gradual shift from a colonial to post-colonial consciousness in the literatures of Australia and New Zealand,” and argues that “in the early colonial poetry of Australia and New Zealand the center was privileged over the periphery to the extent that Australia and New Zealand are effectively absent, while Britain is omnipresent” 22.

¹⁰ In many instances protests signify contestations of ongoing colonisation, or neocolonialism in New Zealand. See, for example, Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty* (Auckland: Broadsheet, 1984) who articulates an indigenous politics of Maori self-determination within a bicultural political framework.

¹¹ Boehmer 3. *Span: Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies*, currently under New Zealand-based editorship, plays an active part in local and international literary circles by publishing and critically reviewing postcolonial literatures. Local lesbian writing and criticism has had some limited exposure in this journal. See, for example, Susan Sayer, “Empire and Nation, Home and Family: Renée’s *Does This Make Sense To You?*,” *Span* 42/43 (1996): 162-73, and Cathie Dunsford, “Manawa Toa: Heart Warrior,” *Span* 46 (1998): 104-15.

reception and recuperation of emergent New Zealand literatures. In light of the general hostility with which the four novels by Renée have been received, I ask: “How might the four novels have otherwise been read?”

To address this question I have turned, in Part One, to a generalised contemporary Western lesbian literary field, a field currently said to be in crisis. This said crisis is characterised by debates which centre on the relative merits of humanist and poststructuralist approaches to representation in a lesbian literary field. In the first part of Chapter One I introduce a broadly defined Western humanist approach to lesbian literary representation, an approach which has set the terms under which the lesbian is understood. This approach to lesbian literary representation is fundamentally a response to a pernicious history which has attached to the term lesbian. Resistance to these historical influences culminated in the mid-twentieth century in lesbian identity politics characterised by lesbian feminist and lesbian separatist community ideals. These ideals, which reached a zenith in the 1970s and 1980s, were embodied in the metaphor of a cultural and political ‘lesbian nation,’¹² which has also served as a metaphor for a lesbian humanist literary aesthetic.

A humanist approach to lesbian literary representation is identifiable by the transparency said to exist between the literature and the community which engendered it. The lesbian subject stands in a signifying relationship to the concepts of authenticity, reliability and representativeness in a humanist discourse

¹² Jill Johnston, *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

of truth. The notion of a definitive and volitional subject capable of her own self-identification, therefore, defines a Western lesbian humanist approach to questions of representation in a lesbian literary field. A Western humanist system of representation has also been influential in the creation of a would-be discrete black lesbian literary field.

Critics who have emerged out of academic poststructuralism over the past decade or so, have challenged Western humanist practices of representation. In the second part of Chapter One I introduce broadly defined poststructuralist interventions into a lesbian humanist literary field. These interventions, which provide a critique of Western humanist subjectivity, are also associated with queer theory. The term 'queer,' which has been associated in the latter part of the twentieth century with diverse political and sexual activist groups and sexual identities and practices,¹³ is also a term which has been associated with the potential of a radical pluralism to undermine the privilege accorded to the subject of Western humanism. A 'queer reading' of the latter reveals a Western humanist subjectivity which privileges (at least) male over female, man over woman, heterosexual over homosexual. From a poststructuralist or queer perspective subjectivity is, therefore, always already characterised by a radical alterity, or intrasubjectivity.

Poststructuralist and queer theorists are also challenging a postcolonial literary field. A queer reading of the Western humanist subject, when deployed in a

¹³ See, for example, Cherry Smyth, *Lesbians Talk Queer Notions* (London: Scarlet Press, 1992), Michael Warner, ed., *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993), and Arlene Stein, ed., *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers: Beyond the Lesbian Nation* (New York: Plume, 1993).

postcolonial context, evokes a radical questioning of that subject found to be privileged as (variously) male-masculine-hetero-white-bourgeoisie. A broadly defined queer reading reveals colonialist subjectivities as discursive effects of a syzygy; being “any rational integral function of a covariant or invariant of a quantic of such nature that it vanishes when stated as a function of the coefficients.”¹⁴

Colonialist subjectivities can, therefore, be read as syzygial, always already and variously coupled and combined in relation to signifiers of (at least) sex, gender, sexuality, race and class. Lesbian subjectivity in postcolonial contexts must, therefore, be approached as a complex discursive contingency. A generalised postcolonial literary field and a generalised lesbian literary field have in common the problematics of the discourse, or text, of lesbian subjectivity. The text of lesbian subjectivity is, therefore, a consideration for the critic practising in postcolonial contexts.

Elsbeth Probyn suggests that “as rhizomatic images, images that continually intertwine one alongside the other, nationality and sexuality constantly rub against each other.”¹⁵ As one such image, the term ‘lesbian nation’ arose in a specific context of political, cultural and sexual activism. Outside of that specificity, the term lesbian nation, in Part Two of this thesis, also signifies a colonialist nation queered in the discursive reconstitution of lesbian subjectivities in a postcolonial

¹⁴ *Webster's Twentieth-Century Dictionary* (New York: The World Syndicate Publishing Company, 1937) 1692.

¹⁵ Elsbeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (Routledge: New York, 1996) 71.

context. The term 'queer nation' signifies the colonialist nation queered in the discursive reconstitution of a range of colonialist subjectivities.

Challenges to Western humanist systems of representation have been faced in a number of disciplines.¹⁶ Across a range of disciplines the newly defined object of analysis is the text. In Chapter Two I develop a strategy for reading the text. This strategy is based on a semiological method formulated by Roland Barthes for rereading the classic text.¹⁷ The classical textual model is located within a Western humanist system of representation. I adapt Barthes's strategy for rereading the classic text and apply it to three colonialist texts taken from the *Empire Annual For Girls*. My rereading of the three colonialist texts illustrates classic signifying practices which constitute colonialist subjectivities (already) variously sexed-gendered-sexualised-raced-classed, and reveals certain contradictions inherent in a Western system of representation. For example, the female colonialist subject is discursively constituted as both coloniser and colonised. My rereading also illustrates how these classic signifying practices are implicated in the constitution of a colonialist literary aesthetic.

Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin argue that in choosing the non-hyphenated term, postcolonial, they do not distinguish between the colonial and post-independence

¹⁶ See George Marcus and Michael Fischer, "A Crisis of Representation in the Human Sciences," *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 7-16.

¹⁷ See Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller, preface by Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990). *S/Z* is Barthes's reading of *Sarrasine* by Honoré de Balzac. Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) which was intended as a manifesto for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the life of signs in society, introduced the term semiology into linguistic discourse.

eras.¹⁸ As I have already pointed out, when more generally applied throughout this thesis, the term ‘postcolonial’ designates an implicit rereading of the presence of a colonialist cultural and symbolic authority in a variety of post-independence contexts. In this sense, the ‘postcolonial critic,’ for example, is “analogous to the analysand who undertakes to work through certain ‘forgotten’ [colonial] moments s/he is otherwise condemned to repeat forever.”¹⁹ Similarly, where the term ‘postcolonial humanism’ is used it designates a humanist theoretical standpoint operating in a postcolonial literary culture. In other words, the term postcolonial humanism is intended to stress “the persistence in the present ... of colonialisms both old and new.”²⁰

My reading of the classic, or “old” colonialist texts from the *Empire Annual For Girls* in Part One, fulfils one of the roles of the postcolonial critic. In Part Two my queer (read: poststructuralist postcolonial) reading of the four “new” novels by Renée fulfils another of the roles of the postcolonial critic. My readings of these novels entail what Anna Rutherford calls “alternative cultural practices to imperialism.”²¹

¹⁸ See footnote 4.

¹⁹ Sneja Gunew, “Feminism/Theory/Postcolonialism,” unpublished manuscript based on a lecture, University of Calgary, 1992: 5. Here Gunew is referring to the term postmodernism and is drawing on the work of Jean-François Lyotard.

²⁰ Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin, preface, *Decolonising Fictions* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1993) 8. Helen Tiffin, “Introduction,” *Past the Last Post: Theorising Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990) points out that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha have focused on “the dismantling of imperial fictions and colonialist ideologies” xv.

²¹ Anna Rutherford, *From Commonwealth to Post-Colonial* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1992) 5.

Similarly, poststructuralist lesbian discourses can be seen to have emerged substantially out of lesbian humanist discourses, the latter being those discourses which are said to represent so-called authentic lesbian identities. It is not my intention to frame my argument in a way that presumes that lesbian humanist discourses are irrelevant to a reading of the text of lesbian subjectivity in postcolonial contexts, or any other context for that matter. There would be no poststructuralist lesbian discourses without lesbian humanist discourses. It is, however, the purpose of my thesis to read, from a poststructuralist perspective, the text of lesbian subjectivity as constituted in humanist colonialist discourses. It is my argument that a poststructuralist rereading of the text of lesbian subjectivity, constituted in humanist colonialist discourses, offers a perspective on the discursive and material conditions under which the lesbian subject lives in postcolonial contexts.

This thesis also locates four novels by Renée in the context of a New Zealand lesbian literature.²² Despite a marked increase in its production over the last two decades, a New Zealand lesbian literature is not widely recognised.²³ In Chapter Three I go some way towards making this literature visible.²⁴ I approach this

²² There is an inevitable degree of slippage in the terms lesbian literature, lesbian writing and lesbian fiction. The term lesbian literature most often refers to literary texts although it is also intended to cover a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts, as does the term lesbian writing. The context in which these terms are used will convey my intended meaning.

²³ For recent commentary on the considered lack of local lesbian writing see Aorewa McLeod and Nina Nola, "The Absent Presence: The Silenced Voice of the 'Other' Woman in New Zealand Fiction," *Feminist Thought in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, eds. Rosemary du Plessis and Lynne Alice (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998) who refer to "the absence of published lesbian voices in the 1990s" 16.

²⁴ See Susan Sayer, "Alive and Well: Lesbian Writing From Aotearoa New Zealand," *Australian Hecate's Women's Book Review* 10 (1998): 24-26. For earlier overviews of New Zealand lesbian writing see Alison Laurie, "Teaching Lesbian Studies," *Feminist Voices: Womens' Studies Texts*

overview of New Zealand lesbian literature in a spirit of recuperation; a recuperation which is intended to impact on the critical reception of a past and of a contemporary New Zealand lesbian literature.²⁵

A contemporary New Zealand lesbian literature produced over the last twenty five years had a beginning in community periodicals and newsletters produced in the context of lesbian cultural and political community allegiances. Social prohibitions on lesbian representation, as well as lesbian separatist and lesbian feminist cultural community ideals, were reflected in the self-imposed constraints placed on the dissemination of these lesbian periodicals. They were largely intended for exclusive circulation amongst a lesbian-only readership. Access to these earlier New Zealand lesbian periodicals remains restricted.

New Zealand lesbian community periodicals are, however, a rich repository of commentary and minutiae pertaining to these communities. Non-fiction items from some of these periodicals appear as footnotes and references in the chapters on the four novels by Renée. These references serve the purpose of making visible earlier lesbian commentary on cultural and political concerns which have informed a subsequent New Zealand lesbian literature, including the four novels

for *Aotearoa/New Zealand*, ed. Rosemary Du Plessis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992): 45-58, and Cathie Dunsford, "The Exploding Frangipani: Recent Lesbian Writing from Aotearoa/New Zealand," *Lesbian Review of Books* 1.3 (1995): 8-9.

²⁵ I use the term recuperation to convey the processes of recovery involved in bringing fresh insights into a literature which has been previously subject to processes of denial and neglect in its dissemination and critical reception. Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation," *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990) expresses the idea of recuperation as a "gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present" 291.

by Renée. Footnoted references from regional lesbian periodicals also reflect on the regions in which Renée's novels are set.

Within the context of a broader New Zealand lesbian literature, I provide a comprehensive, though not exhaustive, overview of New Zealand lesbian fiction published over the last two decades or more.²⁶ In the process of introducing a New Zealand lesbian fiction I give a brief account of some of the material circumstances which attach to its production, dissemination, and critical reception, circumstances which indicate a variety of conditions that both favour and disfavour its present and future production.²⁷

This fiction is, for example, characterised by self-publishing and co-publishing initiatives, independent publishing initiatives and mainstream publications.²⁸ New Zealand lesbian writers have sometimes been supported by national arts-funding bodies. These same funding bodies have also supported New Zealand publishers of lesbian fiction. National literary prize awards have contributed to the recognition of individual New Zealand lesbian writers. New Zealand lesbian fiction published overseas and/or internationally distributed has provided New Zealand lesbian writers

²⁶ See Sandra Pollack and Denise D. Knight, eds., *Contemporary Lesbian Writers of the United States: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (Westport CT: Greenwood, 1993) for a similarly focussed overview of United States lesbian writing and publishing.

²⁷ I have also supplied footnotes and references in relation to non-fiction by New Zealand lesbian writers which may be read as a parallel body of writing to New Zealand lesbian fiction.

²⁸ Co-publication contracts with New Zealand and overseas publishers offer the advantages of an international review process and the advantages of possibly increased sales. This is particularly important for a small country like New Zealand where the population base is insufficient to financially support its writers in terms of royalties in relation to books sales. Overseas distribution is not often offered in New Zealand book contracts.

with international exposure.²⁹ Many of these circumstances which attach to a New Zealand lesbian literature could be seen to attach to any number of literatures emerging in this postcolonial context.³⁰ I argue, however, that an overall lack of recognition of a New Zealand lesbian fiction is due in part to the way some individual works have been received in a New Zealand reviewing community ill-informed as to how such a literature might be read.

Toril Moi suggests that “the feminist critic has attended to historical, anthropological, psychological, and sociological aspects of the ‘female’ text; in short, it would seem, to everything but the text as a signifying process.”³¹ In Chapter Four I outline my own strategy developed for reading the signifying processes which constitute the text of lesbian subjectivity four novels by Renée. This reading strategy is applied to what Barthes refers to as the writerly text, which fragments and rereads the structure of the classic text and in this way makes a Western humanist system of representation available as discourse.

²⁹ Some limited international exposure has been achieved for New Zealand lesbian fictions not distributed outside New Zealand. See, for example, Susan Sayer, “New Zealand Features and Reviews,” *Australian Women’s Book Review* 7.3/4 (1995): 12-22. Since its inception, in 1994, the *Lesbian Review of Books* has given exposure to New Zealand lesbian fiction in a number of reviews and review essays. See Michelle Proctor’s review essay of *The Exploding Frangipani, Subversive Acts*, and *Me and Marilyn Monroe*, “The Exploding Frangipani: Lesbian Writing From the South Pacific,” *Lesbian Review of Books: An International Quarterly Review of Books, By, For, and About Lesbians* (Altadena, Ca.: PO Box 6369) 1.4 (1995): 16-17. *In Translation* was reviewed by Louise Simone, “The Artful Translation of Memory and Desire,” *Lesbian Review* 2.2 (1995-1996) 20. Cathie Dunsford is the New Zealand representative on the editorial board of *Lesbian Review of Books*.

³⁰ Amongst a variety of emergent literatures in New Zealand are what may be termed Maori literatures, Pacific literatures, immigrant literatures, women’s literatures, children’s literatures, working-class literatures, and so on. These literatures may be considered in the light of their respective relationships to a colonialist literary aesthetic. See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989).

³¹ Toril Moi qtd. in Mary Eagleton, ed., *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 193.

It is my contention that each of the four novels is a writerly text in so far as the writerly goal is to support “all of the signifying possibilities, no matter how manifold and contradictory.”³² In the writerly text of the four novels “everything signifies ceaselessly and several times.”³³ The writerly text is not, however, “delegated to a final great ensemble, to an ultimate structure.”³⁴ Compared with the classic text, which endeavours to position the reader as a consumer of the text, the writerly text promotes a relationship with the reader as a producer of the text.

With these Barthesian principles in mind, I engage in a co-productive relationship with the writerly text of each of the four novels. My queer (poststructuralist postcolonial) reading strategy, applied to the writerly text of each of the four novels, reveals the text of, for example, lesbian subjectivity to be (already) variously sexed-gendered-sexualised-raced-classed in colonialist discourses. In other words, the text of lesbian subjectivity is traceable in colonialist discourses as they are reread via the writerly text of four novels by Renée.

In Part Two a separate chapter is devoted to each of the novels which are read in the chronological order of their publication. In these chapters I demonstrate how Renée’s writerly textual practices constitute a rereading of the colonialist nation New Zealand, and how the four writerly novels are also written in signifying

³² Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 257.

³³ Barthes, *S/Z* 12.

³⁴ Barthes, *S/Z* 12.

relationships to the postcolonial nation of Aotearoa New Zealand; a nation always already invested in colonialist ideologies and colonialist discourses. My reading of the four novels demonstrates how the text of lesbian subjectivity, written in a signifying relationship to the colonialist nation New Zealand and to the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand, can now be read as a lesbian text.

Chapter Five is a rereading of the colonialist text of family as it manifests in the writerly text, *Willy Nilly*, where Sonja and Evvie are lovers. Sonja's daughter, Polly, is about to be married and the arrangements for a family wedding are underway. In the writerly process of rereading colonialist discourses of family, *Willy Nilly* strives for anarchy and incoherence. In particular, the legitimating eros of the colonialist nation New Zealand is queered in the writerly text by the presence of the lesbian couple.

Chapter Six is a rereading of the colonialist text of empire as it manifests in the writerly text, *Daisy and Lily*. In *Daisy and Lily* the symbolic structure of the colonialist text of empire is disrupted via the figure of Uncle Auntie, a Maori, transsexual queen who signifies in opposition to the imperialist Queen Mother. Daisy and Lily are childhood sweethearts reunited after forty years separation. Their relationship signifies a legitimating eros for an elderly lesbian couple in the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand.

Chapter Seven is a rereading of the colonialist text of home as it manifests in the writerly text, *Does This Make Sense To You?* In each of the four New Zealand

homes in which the novel is set, the writerly text manifests the symbolic order of the colonialist nation as prohibitive of a female sexuality outside of a hetero-normative and, preferably, christian marriage. The writerly text, *Does This Make Sense To You?* is a rereading of the signifying practices which consolidate a colonialist discourse of illegitimacy and unrespectability in relation to a forced adoption.

Chapter Eight is a rereading of the colonialist text of nation as it manifests in the writerly text, *The Snowball Waltz*. The town of Porohiwi, in which the novel is set, can be read as a metaphor of the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand. The writerly text, *The Snowball Waltz* rereads a colonialist discourse of hetero-masculinity as variously patriotic, xenophobic, racist, misogynist and homophobic. The lesbian couple, Souvie and Resa are forced into exile in London where their relocation into the heart of the hetero-christian symbolic order consolidates a diasporic lesbian experience.

I have elected to read four novels by Renée to demonstrate for the purposes of my thesis that these texts, written in signifying relationships to the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand, can be read productively not only beyond the scope of a colonialist literary aesthetic, but that they can also be read as postcolonial lesbian texts. In other words, these co-productive readings combine to produce the postcolonial lesbian text. Throughout this thesis I have, therefore, used the term “the postcolonial lesbian text” to designate a queer (read: poststructuralist postcolonial) rereading of the Western humanist colonialist lesbian subject.

Just who is a lesbian, a lesbian writer, a lesbian reader, a lesbian critical practitioner may, in practical terms, be unknowable. It is my contention, however, that lesbian texts are manifestly knowable; that is, *readable by anyone*. It is also implicit in my thesis that the queer reading strategy I have developed might be usefully applied to other texts written in signifying relationships to the postcolonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Beyond the application of this strategy to four novels by Renée, this thesis does not attempt to identify which texts that question may also be productively applied to.

In this thesis a case is made for the relevance of developing a theoretical strategy for reading the postcolonial lesbian text in four novels by Renée. This case is also intended to reflect on a range of discursive and material contexts facing scholars writing and researching in the arena of queer theory. Several of my own experiences demonstrate not only the exigencies of an emergent queer theory, but also some of the more practical barriers faced by scholars working in this arena across the last several decades.

In the early stages of formulating a research project to be based in New Zealand lesbian literature I was asked by a New Zealand university English department academic: “Is there a New Zealand lesbian literature?” I replied in the affirmative. I was then asked: “Is it any good?” This question seemed to signify that the literature

would upon examination reveal a certain failure in relation to an implied, mutually-understood literary aesthetic. I also read a salacious curiosity into that question. Another New Zealand university academic warned me that such a “specialised” project would mark me as a professional homosexual. This warning, linked to the implied possibility of professional suicide, signalled the extent to which lesbian scholarship is seen to stem from an exclusively homosexual orientation.³⁵ In other words, *only a lesbian would do it*. Also at the outset of my research in 1994, I had a similar experience to that reported by Judy Grahn who, several decades earlier in the United States, found during her own research that ‘special’ books written by, or about lesbians were kept hidden from full public view and locked in “a jail for books.”³⁶ When trying to locate lesbian texts in the University of Waikato library I found certain books were catalogued “unavailable” and “reported missing.”³⁷ These three textual encounters confirmed for me what I already suspected, that my own research project was implicated in the wider circumstance surrounding the production, dissemination, critical reception and recuperation of a New Zealand lesbian literature.

³⁵ This is an example of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Epistemology of the Closet,” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993) refers to as a “minoritising view” where homo/heterosexual definition is seen as an issue of active importance primarily for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority, 56

³⁶ Judy Grahn, *Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) xi. Kath Weston, *Families We Choose* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) finds older volumes on homosexuality in the Stanford University library are still imprinted with “locked stack” labels 5.

³⁷ I discovered that a “special collection,” including homo-texts that had been subject to constant mutilation and defacement, was located in the basement of this university library making access to them more difficult. Since then this library’s policy has been to re-circulate books which can be repaired. The books which are beyond repair are removed from circulation, not replaced, and, thereby, become “unavailable.”

PART ONE:

THE POSTCOLONIAL LESBIAN TEXT

CHAPTER ONE

READING IN A LESBIAN LITERARY FIELD

Contemporary lesbian literature is a contested field. Reina Lewis argues that the contest occurs “at the intersection of literary criticism and identity politics.”¹ Marilyn Farwell describes this as a “fractious dispute which refuses to see the continuity between yesterday’s lesbian thinking and today’s.”² Meryl Altman finds that “the relationship between 1990s lesbian criticism and the tradition which gave rise to it is uneasy.”³ These and other critics locate the contest in an arena where disputes are characterised by approaches to lesbian literary representation which bear the hallmarks of, on the one hand, a broadly defined Western humanism and, on the other hand, a broadly defined poststructuralism.

Julie Abraham argues that it is “the spirit of the age” which sets the terms on which a text is understood as lesbian.⁴ It is my assessment that the crisis in a contemporary lesbian literary field bears on the terms *lesbian* and *text*. Prior to poststructuralist interventions, *the lesbian* was considered to be a relatively unproblematic representational entity within a lesbian literary field in the latter

¹ Reina Lewis, “The Death of the Author and the Resurrection of the Dyke,” *New Lesbian Criticism: Literary and Cultural Readings*, ed. Sally Munt (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) 18.

² Marilyn Farwell, *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives* (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 25. Farwell points out that the contest between these two schools of thought is “generational as well as theoretical” 13. Poststructuralist interventionists in a lesbian literary field are reported to be from a younger generation of writers.

³ Meryl Altman, “Reconstructive criticism,” *The Women’s Review of Books* 11.4 (1994): 18.

⁴ Julie Abraham, *Are Girls Necessary? Lesbian Writing and Modern Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1996) refers to the “transaction between a writer and the spirit of the age” xi-xii.

part of the twentieth century. A poststructuralist approach to the *lesbian as text* has brought a contemporary lesbian literary field into crisis. From a humanist perspective it is precisely *the text* and not *the lesbian* which constitutes the problem.

In the first half of this chapter I overview historical, social, scientific, legal and political perspectives which have largely shaped the terms under which *the lesbian* has been understood, terms which are implicated in a humanist approach to lesbian literary representation. I then appraise the basic premises of a broadly defined poststructuralist approach to questions of lesbian literary representation. I then introduce poststructuralist and queer interventions in a postcolonial field.

The term lesbian has a troubled history. Lillian Faderman has argued persuasively that a variety of writings since the sixteenth century, in particular those which portray romantic friendships between women, can be termed lesbian even though the term lesbian was usually absent.⁵ Emma Donoghue finds the word lesbian, along with the terms Sapphic and Sapphist, in a variety of poetic, medical, libertine and religious discourses in early eighteenth-century writing.⁶ Paulina Palmer points out that in the late nineteenth century the term lesbian was adopted by British, European, and American male sexologists and psychoanalysts who gave it a

⁵ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing The Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: The Women's Press, 1985).

⁶ Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1995) 112. Donoghue describes the period of her own study as "perhaps the single richest era for the literature of passionate friendship between women" 112.

“scientific description,” which then became popular currency.⁷ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, for example, argued that the lesbian was a man trapped in a woman’s body.⁸ Sigmund Freud theorised lesbianism as an acquired orientation representing an immature stage of development resulting from the failure to make a complete transition from childhood to so-called normal adult female heterosexuality.⁹

Margaret Reynolds observes that in early twentieth-century literature such negative “portraits of lesbians [were] used to reinforce notions of heterosexuality as normal and desirable.”¹⁰ Esther Newton argues that since there was no positive lesbian discourse around the turn of the century in Britain when Radclyffe Hall was writing *The Well of Loneliness*,¹¹ Hall had at her disposal only a discourse of “trapped souls.”¹² Bonnie Zimmerman argues that because the dominant culture was unable to imagine an actual existence for lesbians, fantasy images were created of the

⁷ Paulina Palmer, *Contemporary Lesbian Writing: Dreams, desire, difference* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993) 12.

⁸ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis 1882* (New York: Surgeons Book Co., 1925).

⁹ See Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol 18 (London: Hogarth, 1955).

¹⁰ Margaret Reynolds, “Introduction,” *The Penguin Book of Lesbian Short Stories*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (London: Penguin, 1993) xix.

¹¹ Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*, commentary by Havelock Ellis (Garden City, NY: Blue Ribbon, 1928). In his commentary in *The Well of Loneliness*, Havelock Ellis advanced a theory of sexual inversion which was developed as a scientific defense for the toleration of homosexuals. See Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion 1897* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1911). See also Chris White, “‘She Was Not Really Man At All’: The Lesbian Practice and Politics of Edith Ellis,” *What Lesbians Do In Books*, eds. Elaine Hobby and Chris White (London: The Women’s Press, 1991) 68-85.

¹² Esther Newton, “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman,” *Signs: The Lesbian Issue* 9.4 (1984): 568. See also Margaret Reynolds, “Introduction,” *The Penguin Book of Lesbian Short Stories*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (London: Penguin, 1993) who argues that Virginia Woolf added to “a discreet tradition in literature now claimed as lesbian, distilling all her attraction and admiration in *Orlando* and presenting it as a love gift to Vita [Sackville-West]. None of this could have happened before the twentieth century. Not the knowing, not the naming, not the pleasure, and above all not the writing” xiv.

lesbian as “deviant or depraved.”¹³ Because there were “fears that such women really may exist [they were] controlled and stigmatized through symbols of perversion.”¹⁴

Theories of the deviant lesbian developed in the medical sciences and deployed in literary practices were also paralleled in the legal system. Commenting on literary censorship, Lillian Faderman points out that novelists who were concerned with reflecting truths about lesbian lives “felt compelled to veil their subject matter so that it could be argued, before a judge and jury if need be, that the novel was only alluding to a common friendship between females.”¹⁵ Despite legal censorship and other forms of social and scientific prohibition, lesbian cultural production flourished for a time at the beginning of the twentieth century in Paris. Gillian Spraggs refers to this as a period when “the developing European subculture of same-sex love was first beginning to engage publicly in the task of self-definition and to challenge legal and customary taboos.”¹⁶ Zimmerman also notes a positive

¹³ Bonnie Zimmerman, *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction 1969-1989* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990) 25. *Safe Sea* is an overview of lesbian fiction published primarily by alternative feminist presses in the 1970s and 1980s. Zimmerman reads this fiction as “the collective voice of what we loosely called ‘the lesbian community’ [using] the fiction to identify what lesbians of the past two decades believe to be the ‘truth’ about lesbian existence” xiv.

¹⁴ Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 22.

¹⁵ Faderman, *Surpassing The Love of Men* 392. See also Tucker Pamela Farley, “Introduction: Deconstructing the Absolute-Reality and Difference,” *Contemporary Lesbian Writers Of The United States: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, eds. Sandra Pollack and Denise D. Knight (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993) for her discussion of the exclusion of women in romantic friendships and women “scribblers” from the Parisian literary circles in the early twentieth-century, xxxiv.

¹⁶ Gillian Spraggs, “Divine Visitations: Sappho’s Poetry Of Love,” in Hobby and White, identifies the terms “uranian,” “intermediate,” and “invert,” as in use about this time, 50.

change in attitudes by some writers towards the lesbian in the literature of this period.¹⁷

Lesbian cultural production during the period leading up to and including World War Two is a matter of scant historical record, though some personal accounts have come to light in the form of diaries and letters.¹⁸ Kate Adams refers to a period “beginning in 1952, [when] the works of Freud could be bought in any drugstore, edited for the layperson and produced in cheap, mass-market paperback editions,”¹⁹ and refers to the profound influence in the United States of the 1954 publication of Dr Frank Caprio’s *Female Homosexuality* which “reveals a narrow, punitive, vision of the lesbian as the antithesis of the passive, maternal, domestic, ‘normal’ woman.”²⁰ Moreover, Adams argues: “Caprio, like other sexologists of his time, perceived lesbianism as a disease with the potential of undermining the nation.”²¹

¹⁷ In *Safe Sea*, Zimmerman points out Natalie Barney and Renée Vivien amongst others identified with the “literary movement of modernism [which] provided new forms through which to express the radical changes occurring in attitudes toward sexuality and gender” 6. See, for example, Natalie Clifford Barney, *Pensées d’une amazone* (Paris: Emile-Paul, 1920), and Renée Vivien, *A Woman Appeared To Me*, trans. Jeannette H. Foster (Tallahassee, Fla.: Naiad, 1982). Gertrude Stein is a notable exception to this publicly self-defining lesbian literary sub-culture.

¹⁸ See, for example, Erica Fischer’s *Aimée and Jaguar*, trans. Edna McCown (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1995) for an account of a lesbian love affair between an Aryan German and a German Jew in Nazi Germany.

¹⁹ Kate Adams, “Making the World Safe for the Missionary Position: Images of the Lesbian in Post-World War II America,” *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, eds. Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (New York: New York University Press, 1990) 255.

²⁰ Adams 266. See Frank Caprio, *Female Homosexuality: A Psychodynamic Study of Lesbianism* (New York: Citadel Press, 1955).

²¹ Adams 266. The lasting influence of scientific, cultural and legal views of lesbianism is evident in the homophobic discussions which were represented in Jeannette Foster’s *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (Tallahassee: The Naiad Press, 1985 [1956]), which was intended as a sympathetic account.

Zimmerman refers to the period following World War Two as a period of extreme nationalism—sometimes referred to as McCarthyism—in the United States, when homosexuals and other “subversives” were hounded and removed from public life. Zimmerman argues that in the face of this public persecution “the written word was crucial to sustaining and promoting lesbian identity.”²²

Zimmerman also argues that because writers could not escape the dominant discourses of lesbianism, the “myths of sin and perversion or of the mannish or vampiric lesbian left their mark on virtually all lesbian literature preceding the current wave of feminist writing.”²³ Gabriele Griffin argues that the “multifarious pressures” on lesbian writers more generally manifested in the image of the isolated lesbian, an image which lasted in lesbian literature until the 1950s and 1960s.²⁴ Terry Castle points out that in the wake of dominant cultural views of the lesbian as deviant: “Lesbian contributions to culture have been routinely suppressed or ignored ... censored and destroyed ... silenced and dismissed.”²⁵

Various attempts at lesbian self-definition re-emerged during the politically vigorous late 1960s and early 1970s. This was a period during which a highly visible lesbian identity politics was characterized by the impetus to define a range of common experiences in order to assert sexual, cultural and political rights.

²² Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 9.

²³ Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 22.

²⁴ Gabriele Griffin, *Heavenly Love?: Lesbian images in twentieth-century women's writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) 11-12.

²⁵ Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 5.

Griffin argues that due to the cultural and political visibility achieved in this period there was a “proliferation of lesbian writing and the move from constructing lesbians as ‘deviant’ to seeing them as ‘defiant.’”²⁶ Included in this body of “defiant” lesbian writing are the well-cited and frequently anthologised articles and essays by Catherine Stimpson,²⁷ Adrienne Rich,²⁸ Ann Ferguson, Jacquelyn N. Zita, Kathryn Pyne Addelson,²⁹ and Monique Wittig.³⁰

These essays, which originally appeared in the period from 1980-1982, are characterised by arguments for both inclusivity and exclusivity in definitional terms. Rich argued that all women can be seen to participate more or less in lesbian relationships throughout the course of their lives. Rich introduced the term “lesbian continuum” to include “a range-through each woman’s life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience.”³¹ Palmer suggests that this continuum lead to the view that “the critique of the dominant culture which the lesbian produces is relevant to all women, irrespective of their sexual

²⁶ Griffin, *Heavenly Love?* 12. Griffin, “Introduction,” *Outwrite: Lesbianism and Popular Culture*, ed. Gabriele Griffin (London: Pluto Press, 1993) also points out that this writing has appeared as “sociopolitical comment on lesbian existence, as lesbian theory, and as critique of lesbian cultural production” 1.

²⁷ Catherine R. Stimpson, “Zero Degree Deviance: The Lesbian Novel in English,” *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981): 363-79.

²⁸ Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs: A Journal of Women and Culture and Society* 5 (1980): 631-60.

²⁹ Ann Ferguson, Jacquelyn N. Zita, and Kathryn Pyne Addelson, “On ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’: Defining the Issues,” *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*, eds. Nanerl O. Keohane, Michelle Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982) 147-88.

³⁰ Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and other essays* (New York: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1992).

³¹ Rich 648.

orientation.”³² Rich’s continuum also provided the basis for a vision of a broadly based feminist community. Radical lesbian feminists and lesbian separatists, whose view of lesbian community was one of relative exclusivity, responded to Rich’s essay.³³ Ann Ferguson, Jacquelyn N. Zita, and Kathryn Pyne Addelson, for example, asserted:

Lesbian is a woman who has sexual and erotic-emotional ties primarily with women or who sees herself as centrally involved with a community of self-identified lesbians whose sexual and erotic emotional ties are primarily with women; and who is herself a self-identified lesbian.³⁴

These definitional debates went “hand-in-hand with the creation of specific cultural artefacts, such as novels.”³⁵ Lesbian and lesbian feminist identity politics, therefore, also characterised attempts to formulate a lesbian feminist literary aesthetic. In this process a number of questions were asked.³⁶ The most obvious question to address first was: “what is lesbian writing?” This question is, however,

³² Palmer 51.

³³ Annamarie Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics* (New York: Routledge, 1994) points out that the “discursive field constituted by these [and other] essays does not consolidate some monolithic definition of ‘lesbian,’ rather it generates complementary and conflicting definitions” 10.

³⁴ Ferguson, et al. 155. This definition may be seen to fall at one end of Rich’s lesbian continuum. Susan J. Wolfe and Julia Penelope, *Sexual Practice, Textual Theory: Lesbian Cultural Criticism* (Cambridge and Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) take exception to this definition on the basis that it is exclusive of many whom they would like to bear such an identity.

³⁵ Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 13.

³⁶ Parallel questions and debates were simultaneously taking place in a feminist literary community.

both preceded by, and precipitates the question “what is a lesbian?”³⁷ Farwell suggests that once that first question is asked then “the practical questions are endless.”³⁸ Farwell herself asks: “Does the mere existence or even the centrality of lesbian characters determine that the novel is lesbian when, perhaps, the author is not? How explicit must a text be to be considered lesbian?”³⁹

In attempts to answer questions such as these, writers and critics turned to lesbian feminist community experiences and ideals.⁴⁰ In light of the circumstances surrounding its production, lesbian writing was generally considered to be “shaped by the historical circumstances of lesbian writers.”⁴¹ This concept of lesbian writing gained validity from the idea of the lesbian writer, as figure with feminist allegiances who addresses her texts to the lesbian community.⁴² During the 1970s

³⁷ Feminist literary critics asked, for example: “Does the fiction of a self-avowed feminist necessarily constitute a feminist fiction?” See, for example, Mary Eagleton, ed., *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1986), and Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (London: Virago, 1985).

³⁸ Farwell 6.

³⁹ Farwell 6.

⁴⁰ For parallel discussions taking place in the field of feminist criticism see, for example, Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, “Introduction” *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, eds. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1989) who attribute to feminist literary criticism a refusal “to isolate [a text] from the culture of which it forms a part” 2. They speak of feminist literary criticism as “a generalised analysis of sexual power relations in a range of texts, not all of them fictional” 2. Belsey and Moore assert that early feminist literary critics read women’s writing regarding both form and content “as a mode of resistance” 7.

⁴¹ Abraham xii.

⁴² Zimmerman, in *Safe Sea*, refers to Monique Wittig’s epic prose poem *Les Guérillères* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969) as creating “in a text what feminists were attempting to create through social and political activism: an entirely new way of thinking about women, patriarchy, language and alternative social structures” xiii. Also in *Safe Sea*, Zimmerman refers to *Wittig’s Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary* (New York: Avon, 1978) which, in service to a lesbian feminist community, depicts “women living in total harmony, undivided by nationality, language or men” 28.

and much of the 1980s the lesbian writer was expected to disclose her relationship with “the lesbian community.”⁴³

The lesbian community to which the lesbian writer was expected to bear and demonstrate her allegiance during this period, was represented metaphorically in the concept of lesbian nation.⁴⁴ In the constitution of an idealised lesbian community, the metaphor of lesbian nation had particular appeal for those who had to overcome geographical and social isolation.⁴⁵ Sally Munt, for example, suggests that lesbian readers are “fragmented and dispersed, their act of reading their only collective, unifying gesture.”⁴⁶ Palmer suggests that reading lesbian fiction “helps in some small way to compensate for the degree of isolation and alienation which many lesbians experience on account of the heterosexist bias of the media, press and education system.”⁴⁷ Zimmerman has argued that the very purpose of lesbian fiction is “to map out the boundaries ... of Lesbian Nation.”⁴⁸

⁴³ Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 15.

⁴⁴ Johnston explains the impulse prior to an identity politics which sustained the metaphor of a lesbian nation: “A person was what we all were and we would do the best we could and if we didn’t do so well it was just a failing as a person and that was all There was no lesbian identity” 87. Johnston gives voice to her own experience of isolation from a lesbian culture. Her experience in this respect is not universal. The existence of lesbian cultural communities before and during this time is documented by, for example, Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (Colombia, Colombia University Press, 1991), though these communities were sporadic and isolated.

⁴⁵ Bonnie Zimmerman, “From Lesbian Nation to Queer Nation,” *Hecate: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Women’s Liberation* 21.2 (1995) suggests that “space is a profound metaphor for lesbian writers which has a lot to do with the fact that we were scattered in such a way that we must create a concept of space because that space is not given to us” 33.

⁴⁶ Sally Munt, “‘Somewhere over the rainbow ...’ Postmodernism and the fiction of Sarah Schulman,” Munt, *New Lesbian Criticism* 34. Munt, “Introduction” also argues that lesbian books “have functioned as rites of passage, and signs of kinship for lesbians ... Our literary tradition is a history of the linguistic traces of a common identity” xi.

⁴⁷ Palmer 3. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993) explain this phenomenon of lesbian community in the following way: “The focus on community rather than

Lesbian writers were expected to be committed to a lesbian feminist literary ideal.⁴⁹ Zimmerman, for example, suggests that both lesbian writers and lesbian readers “often expect fiction to ‘tell it like it is’—that is, to tell the truth about lesbians in order to replace existing lies and ‘stereotypes.’”⁵⁰ Munt asserts that for this reason many lesbian writers have been “acting under a compulsion to tell the truth, to record, to evangelise, and to be politically correct.”⁵¹ In a way which reflected the spirit of lesbian nation, the early lesbian novels written during this period tended to be “intensely idealistic and utopian.”⁵² Zimmerman also argues that the lesbian community “wants its fiction accessible, entertaining, and just ‘correct’ enough to be a bit bland.”⁵³ For these reasons, Zimmerman argues that the

the individual is based upon our assumption that community is key to the development of twentieth-century lesbian identity and consciousness But the ideology characterising gays and lesbians as isolated, abnormal individuals remains so dominant that the importance of community in twentieth-century working-class lesbian life has reached few people and has to be affirmed and explained regularly to new audiences” 3.

⁴⁸ Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 21.

⁴⁹ Altman suggests: “Where one’s culture is thin on the ground [s]carcity ups the ante—each book that does appear is expected to be everything to all people” 17.

⁵⁰ Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 23. In *Safe Sea*, Zimmerman argues: “Lesbian novels are read by lesbians in order to affirm lesbian existence” 15. See also Palmer who argues that Elizabeth Riley’s Australian novel *All That False Instruction* (Sirius Quality Paperback, 1981) is based “on the assumption that the first step towards achieving a lesbian identity and way of life is to problematize and reflect the oppressive stereotypes of femininity promoted by the dominant culture” 41.

⁵¹ Munt, “Introduction” xi.

⁵² Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 121. Palmer refers to Sally Miller Gearhart’s *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1979) as having achieved “the status of a cult novel” 55. Palmer attributes the success of this novel to its “elaboration of the metaphorical term ‘Lesbian Nation’” 55.

⁵³ Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 19.

“mode of exposition is classic expressive realism and [the] intention is fidelity to the dynamics of individual lesbian lives and the collective lesbian community.”⁵⁴

Lewis argues that lesbian literary criticism has also been “an area of critical study [that] defines its critical practitioners.”⁵⁵ Ann Charles, for example, defines lesbian feminist criticism as “critical work produced by lesbians who openly and consciously bring their lesbianism and/or lesbian feminism to bear on their critical practice.”⁵⁶ Zimmerman argues that “literary texts and acts of reading are gendered [and] that it matters whether a writer, reader, or critic is male or female.”⁵⁷ Proceeding from the premise that critical practitioners in a lesbian literary field are lesbians, Zimmerman asks: “what is the responsibility of the lesbian critic to the writer, to the text, and to the community of readers?”⁵⁸ For

⁵⁴ Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 24. See also Lewis who argues: “The breaking of the long silencing of lesbian speech has led to a flood of intense, immediate, intimate, and sometimes awkward written expression” 18.

⁵⁵ Lewis 17. Lewis asks: “Do all the critics have to be lesbian, do all the texts have to be lesbian?” 12.

⁵⁶ Ann Charles, “Two Feminist Criticisms: A Necessary Conflict,” Wolfe and Julia Penelope 55.

⁵⁷ Bonnie Zimmerman, “Perverse Reading: The Lesbian Appropriation of Literature,” Wolfe and Penelope 135. Eagleton argues that this kind of scrutiny in relation to women’s writing reflects a “prescriptive criticism [which] reads in many ways like a feminist equivalent to socialist realism. Instead of writing placing itself at the service of the worker’s realism, it is now at the service of feminist liberation, instead of developing class solidarity, writing now promotes sisterhood ... a kind of propaganda writing” 153. See also Cheri Register, “American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographic Introduction,” Eagleton 169-74. Register suggests that to earn feminist approval literature must perform one of more of the following functions: “serve as a forum for women, help to achieve cultural androgyny, provide role-models, promote sisterhood, and augment consciousness-raising” 169. Feminist literary critics address the way feminist writing has been marginalised in relation to a masculinist canon. See also, Elaine Showalter, “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness,” *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988) who proposes the term “gynocritics” for women critics of women’s writing, 335. See also Lillian Robinson, “Treasure our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon,” *Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory and criticism*, eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991) 212-26.

⁵⁸ Bonnie Zimmerman, “Lesbians Like This and That: Some Notes on Lesbian Criticism for the Nineties,” Munt, *New Lesbian Criticism* 13. Parallel processes can be observed in the constitution of a feminist literary aesthetic and community ideal. See, for example, Annette

Zimmerman there is a responsibility which entails defining “the term ‘lesbian’ and then determin[ing] its applicability to both writer and text, sorting out the relation of literature to life.”⁵⁹ Zimmerman links literature to life from a humanist perspective, a perspective in which lesbian sexual, cultural and political identity is an *a priori* possibility.

Black lesbian writers and black lesbian critics have also oriented writing and reading practices towards the creation of a discrete black lesbian literary tradition. In parallel to the concept of lesbian nation deployed in a wider lesbian literary field, Jewell Gomez refers to black lesbian writers’ task of creating “our home.”⁶⁰ SDiane A. Bogus traces the creation of a “Black lesbian-feminist aesthetic.”⁶¹ Gloria T. Hull describes the isolated conditions in which black lesbian writers have worked.⁶² Bogus draws attention to the “belief that only black lesbian feminists can speak the truth about their lives.”⁶³ Barbara Smith remarks that, “writing about Black

Kolodny, “Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism,” Warhol and Herndl 97-116.

⁵⁹ Bonnie Zimmerman, “What Has Never Been: An Overview of Feminist Literary Criticism,” *Feminist Studies* 7 (1981): 459. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985) defines her own project thus: “to illuminate the relationship between feminist critical readings and the often unconscious theoretical and political assumptions that inform them” 1.

⁶⁰ Jewell Gomez qtd. in Bogus 275. See also J. R. Roberts, “Black Lesbians before 1970: A Bibliographic Essay,” *Lesbian Studies: Present and Future*, ed. Margaret Cruikshank (Old Westbury, N. Y.: Feminist Press, 1979) 103-9.

⁶¹ SDiane A. Bogus, “The ‘Queen B’ Figure in Black Literature,” Jay and Glasgow 276. See also Jewell Gomez, “A Cultural Legacy Denied and Discovered: Black Lesbians in Fiction by Women,” *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color, 1983) 110-23.

⁶² See Gloria T. Hull, ed., *Give Us This Day: The Diary of Alice Dunbar Nelson* (New York: Norton, 1984).

⁶³ Bogus argues that this belief denies the contribution of the nonlesbian Ann Allen Shockley who seemingly lacks the political credentials of a black lesbian writer. Bogus points out that Shockley’s black lesbian character was critiqued as “lacking viability and authenticity” 277.

women writers from a feminist perspective and about Black lesbian writers from any perspective [has] not been done.”⁶⁴ She argues that a black feminist criticism would begin “with a primary commitment to exploring how both sexual and racial politics, and Black and female identity, are inextricable elements in black women’s writing.”⁶⁵ Smith finds “varying degrees of verisimilitude and authenticity” in a range of novels by black lesbians.⁶⁶ Smith argues: “Black women are still in the position of having to ‘imagine,’ discover, and verify Black lesbian literature because so little has been written from an avowedly lesbian perspective.”⁶⁷ Shared approaches to “creating literature [are] a direct result of the specific political, social, and economic experiences [black women writers] have been obliged to share.”⁶⁸

Bogus notes that Shockley’s first two novels were rejected by many publishers. See Ann Allen Shockley, “The Black Lesbian in American Literature: A Critical Overview,” *Conditions Five* (1979): 133-42, and “Black Lesbian Biography ‘Lifting the Veil,’” *Other Black Woman* 1 (1982): 1-13.

⁶⁴ Barbara Smith, “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism,” Showalter 168.

⁶⁵ Smith, “Toward” 174.

⁶⁶ Barbara Smith, “The Truth That Never Hurts: Black Lesbians in Fiction in the 1980s,” *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Tourres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 111.

⁶⁷ Smith, “Toward” 181.

⁶⁸ Smith, “Toward” 174. Gwendolyn Mae Henderson, “Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics and the Black Woman Writer’s Literary Tradition,” *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994) argues that black women are “subsumed under the category of woman in the feminist critique and the category of black in the racial critique” 258. See also Barbara Christian, *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), Nellie McKay, “Reflections on Black Women Writers: Revising the Literary Canon,” Warhol and Herndl, 249-68, and Barbara Christian, “Trajectories of Self-Definition: Placing Contemporary Afro-American Women’s Fiction,” Warhol and Herndl 316-32.

In the second half of the twentieth-century lesbian writers have been urged to take the pernicious history attached to the term lesbian into account when deciding on reading and writing strategies which would best help them achieve cultural and political community goals. Lesbian writers have been charged with the truthful representation of the “real, material difference” of lesbian lives.⁶⁹ Where the facility of transparency has been attached to the written word, lesbian literary acts of self-identification are read as, potentially, authentic and reliable representations of an “avowedly lesbian perspective.”⁷⁰

The said possibility of authenticity in the creation of a discrete and definitive lesbian literature has led to the prescription that *only a lesbian can do it*. The same said possibility of authenticity in the creation of a discrete and definitive black lesbian literature has led to the prescription that *only a black lesbian can do it*.⁷¹ Debates on lesbian class identity have produced a parallel literature and critical practice in a lesbian literary field.⁷²

⁶⁹ Wolfe and Penelope 3. This point is discussed in depth by Munt, “Introduction” ix-xii.

⁷⁰ Smith, “Toward” 181

⁷¹ There is a tendency for black lesbian literature to be subsumed under the rubric of lesbian literature *per se*. For many black lesbians commitment to a lesbian literary field *per se* does constitute a primary commitment. This is evident in a range of recent publishing initiatives where editors make known their disappointment at the relative absence of critical work by black lesbians and lesbians of colour. In *Outwrite*, Griffin points out that in this collection there are no contributions by Asian or Black women 6. Munt, “Introduction,” comments that a failure for commissioned essays to materialize “reflects the pressure of the few to represent the many” xix. Hobby and White make it known that “while a great deal of work on books is being done by Blacklesbians in Britain today [we were] not able to find any who had the time, or would choose, to write for this collection” 4. Jay and Glasgow draw attention to what they consider to be “a larger problem in the academic world [where] those who speak from the vantage point outside the dominant, white, heterosexual ‘center’ are all too often overworked and overcommitted” 8.

⁷² See, for example, Dorothy Alison, *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class and Literature* (New York: Firebrand Books, 1994). For bibliographies useful to the study of working-class literature, see also appendices in Paul Lauter, “Working-Class Women’s Literature: An Introduction to Study,” Warhol and Herndl, 837-56, and “Caste, Class, and Canon,” Warhol and Herndl 227-48.

Any number of lesbian identities implicated in a proliferation of discrete and definitive literatures and correspondingly discrete and definitive critical practices, can be viewed as part of a “new cultural pluralism which developed in the late sixties and early seventies (women’s, gay and black militancy being especially significant).”⁷³ In opposition to these politically-motivated lesbian literary and critical practices a variety of poststructuralist approaches, sometimes under the rubric of “critical pluralism,”⁷⁴ constitute a challenge to humanist practices of representation in a lesbian literary field.

The shared principle of a variety of poststructuralist approaches to literary and social criticism is the premise that language, based on a closed-system of signification where there are only relational differences, is logo-centric. Whatever distinguishes one sign from another is what constitutes it. The sign is inhabited, therefore, by “a radical alterity.”⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida delineates this process of linguistic signification:

The signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that it would refer only to itself every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system which refers to the other, to other concepts, by means

⁷³ Raman Selden, ed., “Introduction,” *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism Volume 8: From Formalism to Poststructuralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 6.

⁷⁴ Selden 6. See also Homi K. Bhabha, “The commitment to theory,” *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) who describes cultural diversity as “an epistemological object—culture as an object of empirical knowledge” 34. The concept of cultural difference “focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation” 34.

⁷⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” *of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984) xxxviii.

of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, *différance*, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general.⁷⁶

Like language, subjectivity is also characterized by relational difference. Therefore, Derrida argues, “language is not a function of the speaking subject.” Rather, the subject “is a ‘function’ of language.”⁷⁷ Judith Butler brings this poststructuralist principle of linguistic signification to bear on the term lesbian. She argues that in determining a lesbian identity “that which it excludes in order to make that determination remains constitutive of the determination itself.”⁷⁸

Butler also asks:

Is it not possible that lesbian sexuality is a process that reinscribes the power domain that it resists, that it is constituted in part from the very heterosexual matrix that it seeks to displace, and that its specificity is to be established, not *outside* or *beyond* that inscription or reiteration, but in the very modality and effects of that reinscription ... call[ing] into question the claims of heterosexual priority.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982) 11. The concept of *différance* articulates how the sign “unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions” 16.

⁷⁷ Derrida, *Margins* 15. This is a Saussurean principle articulated by Derrida.

⁷⁸ Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991) 15.

⁷⁹ Butler 1. See also Diana Fuss “Inside/Out,” in Fuss, *Inside/Out*, who argues: “Heterosexuality can never fully ignore the close psychical proximity of its terrifying (homo)sexual other, anymore than homosexuality can entirely escape the equally insistent social pressures of (hetero)sexual conformity” 3.

Jagose argues from a poststructuralist perspective that “the most efficacious task for lesbian theorists is not to secure a body or a sexuality beyond networks of power but to understand that body, that sexuality, as incoherently constituted through discourse.”⁸⁰ From a poststructuralist perspective the category lesbian is not essentially radical or subversive. Instead, “the category ‘lesbian’ is not essentially anything. It does not have a fixed valence, a signification that is proper to itself.”⁸¹

Western humanist concepts of the lesbian writer and lesbian writing are rethought from a poststructuralist perspective. Chris Weedon points out that “authorship cannot be the source of the authority of meaning any more than the individual speaking subject, the agent of discourse, is its origin.”⁸² Griffin asserts: “To talk of ‘lesbian writing’ is to raise the issue of difference, for the adjective ‘lesbian’ implies both a presence, a mark of distinction, and an absence, something which is *not that*.”⁸³ Jagose argues that in a variety of “lesbian utopics,” the absences or “spaces of alterity that mark utopic figurations of ‘lesbian’ are various—the space beyond representation, patriarchal nomination, heterosexual exchange, binary opposition.”⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics* 4-5.

⁸¹ Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics* 9.

⁸² Chris Weedon qtd. in Katie King, “Lacquered Layerings: The Lesbian Bar as a site of Literary Production,” Munt, *New Lesbian Criticism* 51. Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in Lodge, writes that “Mallarmé was doubtless the first to see and foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner” 168.

⁸³ Griffin 3.

⁸⁴ Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics* 2. In *Lesbian Utopics* Jagose has undertaken deconstructive readings of “lesbian utopics” in order to illustrate that “what poses as subversion may, in fact, be

The dispute as to the relative merits of humanist and poststructuralist approaches to lesbian literary criticism, has received attention from a number of critics. Palmer, for example, compares lesbian “libertarianism and poststructuralist approaches.”⁸⁵ Zimmerman assesses that “current criticism stands at an intersection between separatism and deconstruction.”⁸⁶ Altman argues that, so far, lesbian criticism “has been caught between two competing aesthetics. One favors authenticity, realism, experience, verisimilitude—along with ‘positive images’ of lesbians ... the other prefers textual disruption.”⁸⁷ She suggests that the former aesthetic is favoured by those who are “concerned to hold some sort of Maginot Line against deconstructive theory and other impurities.”⁸⁸ Susan J. Wolfe and Julia Penelope argue:

Lesbian theory, including critical theory, and Lesbian literary criticism ... has had the task of positing a Lesbian subject, experienced through a

complicit with that which it purports to subvert” 5-6. The texts Jagose has read in this way are: Luce Irigaray’s *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), Nicole Brossard’s *The Aerial Letter*, trans. Marlene Wildeman (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1988), Marilyn Hacker’s *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons* (New York: Arbor House, 1986), Mary Fallon’s *Working Hot* (Melbourne: Sybylla Co-operative Press, 1989), and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/aunt lute, 1987).

⁸⁵ Palmer 22.

⁸⁶ Bonnie Zimmerman, “Lesbians Like This” 3.

⁸⁷ Altman 18.

⁸⁸ Altman 17. Much feminist literary criticism of the 1970s and 1980s rested on the humanist assumption that there exists in the lives and experiences of women a subject matter which properly constitutes an unproblematic body of women’s knowledge which is accessible via women’s writing. More general philosophical inquiries were beginning to reveal that the terms woman and man were not simply mutually exclusive, but were contingent and that the nature of this contingency is at once concealed and revealed in language. In *Lesbian Utopies*, Annamarie Jagose argues: “Careful specification of difference cannot solve the problem of feminism’s nomination of ‘women’ as its foundation” 15.

collective history and culture we have had to construct before we can begin to *deconstruct* Lesbian identity.⁸⁹

Recalling what they regard as a collective history and culture, Wolfe and Penelope remind readers:

In one hundred short years, German sexologists have “appeared” lesbians in order to pathologize [lesbians] and French poststructuralists have “disappeared” [lesbians] in order to deconstruct sex and gender categories and to “interrogate” “the” subject.⁹⁰

Wolfe and Penelope present the crisis of representation in a lesbian literary field as follows:

The simultaneous emergence of Lesbian and other minority identities and cultures on the one hand, and of the poststructural deconstruction of the ideas of self, author, text and identity on the other, may be mere coincidence. Given the historical erasure of Lesbians, however, the current trend within poststructuralist criticism to regard Lesbian difference as a discursive or textual construct, coupled with the very real denial or denigration of Lesbians outside the confines of “theory” emerges as a very real threat to Lesbians and their identities.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Wolfe and Penelope 3.

⁹⁰ Wolfe and Penelope 1.

⁹¹ Wolfe and Penelope 5-6.

Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow also give voice to the struggles and frustrations which characterise this contemporary debate in a lesbian literary field:

A generation after the debate began, thoughtful and concerned feminists do not, perhaps *cannot*, agree about just who is a lesbian Who is the lesbian writer or the lesbian reader? Are lesbian texts, readers, and writers so hopelessly unknowable that we can only shout each other off the page?⁹²

Farwell recalls a time when narrative was considered to be a “relatively neutral tool into which lesbians can be written.”⁹³ Farwell points that, now, a lesbian narrative involves two contested terms, lesbian and narrative. Therefore:

What would, on the surface appear to be a simple issue—a lesbian narrative is a story about women who are sexually attracted to other women—has become over the last twenty-five years a complex theoretical problem dividing current literary critics and theorists, pitting anti-essentialists against essentialists, pro-narrative against anti-narrative factions, and political lesbian-feminists from the 1970s and their descendants against queer theorists of the 1990s.⁹⁴

⁹² Jay and Glasgow 4.

⁹³ Farwell 4.

⁹⁴ Farwell 4.

As Farwell points out, poststructuralist interventions in a lesbian critical field are associated with queer theory.⁹⁵ The term queer, which was once “the most despised of epithets,”⁹⁶ has also been associated in the latter part of the twentieth century with diverse political and sexual activist groups in the designation of sexual identities and sexual practices. Now the term queer also describes “analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire.”⁹⁷ In the context of queer theory, queer is not an identity, but rather a critique of identity.⁹⁸ Jagose argues that because “queer is unaligned with any specific identity category it has the potential to be annexed profitably to any number of discussions.”⁹⁹

Arising in a predominantly Western literary culture, the notion of a discrete (read: distinct) and definitive lesbian subject capable of her own representation defines a humanist approach to questions of representation in a lesbian literary field. The impulse behind the production of a discrete lesbian literature, located in the aims of political and cultural lesbian communities, is predicated on a discourse of truth characterised by concepts of lesbian identity and lesbian authority. Occurring across several decades of political activism, lesbian literary objectives have

⁹⁵ See Bonnie Zimmerman, “Introduction,” *The New Lesbian Studies: Into the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Toni A. H. McNaron and Bonnie Zimmerman (New York: The Feminist Press, 1996) xiv.

⁹⁶ In *Safe Sea*, Zimmerman refers to an early queer attribution as “someone or something that cannot be assimilated into traditional gender roles, and is, therefore, frighteningly different ... a rule-breaker, outlaw, queer, and lesbian” 47.

⁹⁷ Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1996) 3.

⁹⁸ In *Queer Theory*, Jagose describes queer theory as “a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of a more traditional lesbian and gay studies” 1.

⁹⁹ Jagose, *Queer Theory 2*.

aggregated in the metaphor of lesbian nation., which Monique Wittig claimed to be everywhere.¹⁰⁰ Zimmerman finds, however, that “this lesbian culture has been embraced so far primarily by white western women.”¹⁰¹

It is my proposition that the tensions which exist between lesbian humanists and lesbian poststructuralists in a lesbian literary field can be better understood by turning to a postcolonial critical field. As Zimmerman suggests, a Western lesbian humanist culture has not been all-embracing. Postcolonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the “ways in which history has been narrativised always secures a certain kind of subject position which is predicated on marginalising certain areas.”¹⁰² Speaking in relation to a wider set of postcolonial objectives, Spivak nevertheless conveys the sense in which a Western humanist system of representation in a lesbian literary field has had both a marginalising and a colonising effect, the latter effect being in direct contradiction to stated lesbian political objectives. Indeed, the very use of the term colonisation, deployed across a range of disciplines, has become the focus of critical attention.

Neil Smith and Cindi Katz point out that spatial metaphors have become a predominant means by which social life is understood “providing an attractive lexicon for many feminist, postmodernist, and postcolonial enquiries.”¹⁰³ A

¹⁰⁰ Monique Wittig qtd. in Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 13.

¹⁰¹ Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 13.

¹⁰² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Strategy, Identity, Writing,” *The Postcolonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies and Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990) 43.

¹⁰³ Neil Smith and Cindi Katz, “Grounding Metaphor: Towards a spatialized politics,” *Place and the Politics of Identity*, eds. Michael Keith and Steve Pile (London: Routledge, 1993) 67-68.

colonial lexicon, which arose in situations of historical, geographical and political specificity, was adopted by a wide range of civil rights movements including the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, though its usage has not been universally favoured.¹⁰⁴ For example, the adoption of the metaphor of colonisation, by white Western feminists to articulate the oppression of white women, has resulted in charges of cultural appropriation and discursive colonisation. It was argued by Chandra Talpade Mohanty that via the gaze of a Western ahistorical essentialism, differences, both local and specific as well as world-wide and general, are rendered invisible, resulting in "the production of the 'third-world woman' as a singular monolithic subject."¹⁰⁵

Barbara Milech comments on "a sense of unease that has to do with the use of the trope of colonisation within a range of feminist theorising and criticism."¹⁰⁶ In

Smith and Katz note that in social theory and in literary criticism "theoretical spaces have been 'explored,' 'mapped,' 'chartered,' 'contested,' 'colonized,' 'decolonized,' and everyone seems to be 'travelling'" 67-68.

¹⁰⁴ Janette Turner Hospital, "Territorial Imperatives," rev. of *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space*, eds. Margaret Higonnet and Joan Templeton, *The Women's Review of Books* 12.4 (1995) suggests that "it is one of the great disadvantages of being a feminist critic that one cannot discover even a very fine female novelist without wanting to appropriate her, colonize her work, turn her into a mapped, measure and morally evaluated site of discourse" 15.

¹⁰⁵ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary 2: A Journal of Postmodern Literature and Culture* 12.13 (1984) 51. Diane Lichtenstein, *Writing Their Nations: The Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Women Writers* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992) points out that when she was reading criticism about nineteenth-century American women she "was witnessing a process of metonymy—that is, white, middle-class Christians were "standing for" all women" ix.

¹⁰⁶ Barbara Milech, "Metaphoric Strategies: Feminist Criticism and the Trope of Colonisation," *Speaking Positions: Aboriginality, Gender and Ethnicity in Australian Cultural Studies*, eds. Penny Van Toorn and David English (Melbourne: Department of Humanities, Victoria University of Technology, 1995) 107.

Western feminists' attempts to "counter feminism's imperialist tendency,"¹⁰⁷ Milech finds: "Race *and* class *and* gender *and* sexuality *and* ... –each becomes an interchangeable element of a "unified ampersand identity."¹⁰⁸ The "collapse of differences" which takes place in the metaphor "woman as colonised" suggests an unquestioned reciprocity and equivalence.¹⁰⁹

Up to this point I have outlined the general principles which characterize much of the debate taking place in the generalised field of Western lesbian literary criticism. They are as follows: Firstly, lesbian humanist discourses arising in contexts of lesbian political and cultural activism—and also within the context of wider civil rights movements—have constructed the idea of a definitive lesbian. Second, lesbian poststructuralist discourses stand in interdependent relationships to lesbian humanist discourses by means of discursively deconstructing humanist discourses of lesbian identity. Third, lesbian poststructuralist discourses have been critiqued by lesbian humanists for *disappearing the lesbian*. Fourth, the effects of white, Western, humanist discourses of lesbian identity have been critiqued for their colonising impact on non-Western women and women of colour.

¹⁰⁷ Milech 3.

¹⁰⁸ Milech 117.

¹⁰⁹ Milech 117.

Further to these debates which are taking place within the field of lesbian literary criticism, I have identified a similar debate taking place at the intersection of postcolonial theory and queer, or lesbian poststructuralist, theory which can help to illuminate the processes of discursive colonisation as well as contribute to an understanding of the problematics of lesbian representation in postcolonial contexts. Judith Raiskin, for example, suggests:

The fields of both postcolonial theory and lesbian and gay theory provide us with examples of the ways identities and cultures are invented, experienced, destabilized, and recreated through classification systems that change in relation to political and historical pressures.¹¹⁰

Some theorists working in what may be termed a generalised postcolonial critical field have adopted broadly defined poststructuralist approaches to the radical alterity inherent in subjectivity in postcolonial contexts. Raiskin points out:

Categories of sexual behaviour and identity created by nineteenth- and twentieth-century sexologists were also influenced by the classification systems of race, whereby people of colour, particularly “mixed race” people, and homosexuals were conflated through the ideas of evolution and degeneration prevalent in the late nineteenth century.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Judith Raiskin, “Inverts and Hybrids: Lesbian Rewritings of Sexual and Racial Identities,” *The Lesbian Postmodern*, ed. Laura Doan (Columbia University Press: New York, 1994) 156.

¹¹¹ Raiskin 157.

Anne McClintock puts forward a poststructuralist perspective on such classification systems when she argues that “the categories of race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other ... Rather they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other—if in contradictory and conflictual ways.”¹¹² Gwen Bergner also adopts a poststructuralist approach in her objective of “delineating the interdependence of race and gender.”¹¹³ Bergner argues that in a “homosocial, heterosexual colonial economy [where] racial identity is always differentiated by gender,”¹¹⁴ a “normative raced masculinity depends on the production or exclusion of femininities.”¹¹⁵ Sagri Dhairyam argues that lesbian identity must be articulated over “the complex resistance of a colored body.”¹¹⁶ Dhairyam argues that for lesbians of colour there is always “an intersecting epistemic regime of racism.”¹¹⁷

¹¹² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 5. McClintock argues that “no social category should remain invisible with respect to an analysis of empire” 9.

¹¹³ Gwen Bergner, “Who Is That Masked Woman? or; The Role of Gender in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*,” *PMLA* 110.1 (1995): 77. Bergner’s argument is constructed in relation to Frantz Fanon’s psychoanalytic paradigm of the colonial relation.

¹¹⁴ Bergner 85.

¹¹⁵ Bergner 77. See also Henderson who finds a subject “racialized in the experiencing of gender” 259.

¹¹⁶ Sagri Dhairyam, “Racing the Lesbian, Dodging White Critics,” Doan 25.

¹¹⁷ Dhairyam 31. Dhairyam points out that an intersecting epistemic regime of racism is “visible in all but exceptional cases” 31.

It is precisely an “intersecting epistemic regime of racism” that Ann Laura Stoler confronts when she asks what happens when discourses of sexuality are “refigured in an imperial field?”¹¹⁸ In response to her own question Stoler argues:

Europe’s eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourses on sexuality, like other cultural, political, or economic assertions, cannot be charted in Europe alone Europe’s eighteenth-century discourses can—indeed—must be traced along a more *circuitous imperial* route that leads to nineteenth-century technologies of sex. They were refracted through the discourses of empire and its exigencies, by men and women whose affirmations of a bourgeois self, and the racialized contexts in which those confidences were built, could not be disentangled.¹¹⁹

In this chapter I have overviewed Western humanist approaches to questions of representation in a lesbian literary field characterised by an orientation towards *who*, or *what*, is being written about. A broadly defined humanist approach to lesbian literary representation sets the terms on which *the lesbian* is understood. I have also outlined how a broadly defined poststructuralist approach to lesbian literary representation sets the terms on which *the lesbian* is understood *as text*.

¹¹⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race And The Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality And The Colonial Order Of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) 6. Stoler’s commentary presented here is by way of her critique of Foucault. She finds that in “short-circuiting empire, Foucault’s history of European sexuality misses key sites in the production of that discourse” 7. See also Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester University Press, 1990).

¹¹⁹ Stoler 7.

Poststructuralist interventions in a lesbian literary field can, therefore be understood as textual interventions into, or readings of, lesbian humanist discourses.

In light of the arguments put forward by the poststructuralist postcolonial critics introduced above, I propose that poststructuralist reading strategies can disrupt lesbian humanist discourses in a postcolonial field by bringing the term lesbian into a textual relationship with the categories of (at least) sex, gender, sexuality, race and class. Since a poststructural reading strategy deployed in a postcolonial field must necessarily engage with discourses of (at least) sex, gender, sexuality, race and class, I propose that such an undertaking may be included under the rubric of queer theorising. I also propose that as queer theorising is a textually-oriented and not a sexually-oriented undertaking, it has the potential to be annexed profitably by any critical practitioner to any number of discussions. In other words, *anyone can do it to anything*. This is not to say either that *anything goes*, or that such textually-oriented theorising will be equally profitable for all. I do, however, suggest that the insights of the poststructuralist postcolonial critic *may* be profitably annexed by, for example, the poststructuralist lesbian critic working in a postcolonial literary field, and vice versa.

The trajectory of the remainder of this thesis has been inspired, in part, by Stoler's indication of "a more *circuitous imperial* route" taken in the discursive constitution of sexual subjectivities in colonialist contexts. It is also the very collapse of differences, which takes place in the metaphor of woman as colonised

in lesbian and feminist humanist discourses, that this thesis undertakes a rereading of the text of lesbian subjectivity in colonialist and postcolonial contexts. In such circumstances a poststructuralist reading becomes a queer reading when it engages with the textually interdependent categories of (at least) sex, gender, sexuality and race in colonialist and postcolonial discourses.

CHAPTER TWO
READING THE TEXT

The crisis of representation affecting a contemporary lesbian literary field—with respect to the demand for lesbian authenticity and lesbian authority via humanist discourses of identity in the production of fictions and related critical practices—is occurring across a range of other disciplines in the human sciences also giving rise to a debate about the place of fiction in those disciplines. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, for example, points out: “Fiction, like myth, is part of the conceptual repertoire of contemporary societies.”¹ He argues that “we need to incorporate the complexities of expressive representation [for example] novels into our ethnographies, not only as technical adjuncts but as primary materials with which to construct and interrogate our own representations.”² Arguing for a poststructuralist approach to questions of representation in a more broadly defined field of study, Appadurai suggests:

The subject matter of cultural studies could roughly be taken as the relationship between the word and the world [where] *word* can encompass all forms of textualized expression, and *world* can mean anything from the means of production [to] globalized relations of cultural reproduction.³

¹ Arjun Appadurai, “Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology,” *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (School of American Research Press: Santa Fe, 1991) 202. Appadurai locates this problematic of representation in “cultural studies in a global domain” 194.

² Appadurai 208.

³ Appadurai 196. Appadurai suggests that “an anthropology of representation ... would profit immensely from our recent discoveries about the politics and poetics of ‘writing’” 203.

Similarly, Ann Game argues against the reality-fiction opposition in a humanist sociology of literature. Game proposes that the social is not in a different register from the literary. Rather: “Once everyday practice [is understood] as a reading-writing or textual practice there is no extra-textual ground for social analysis to cling on to.”⁴ Postcolonial literary theorists Brydon and Tiffin also suggest: “What we have learned to privilege as the literary text participates in (derives from, and contributes to) the social text.”⁵ Munt suggests that a poststructuralist orientation to questions of representation that links these once disparate areas of study, may be usefully appropriated by lesbian studies.⁶

The problematics of a Western humanist system of representation, interrogated by poststructuralist approaches across a range of disciplines as outlined above, has also occasioned debate on the character of interdisciplinary studies, the nature of which is confronted squarely by Barthes who suggests:

Interdisciplinary work, so much discussed these days, is not about confronting already constituted disciplines (none of which, in fact, is willing to let itself go). To do something interdisciplinary it's not enough to choose a “subject” (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences.

⁴ Ann Game, *Undoing The Social: Towards a Deconstructive Sociology* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991) x-xii.

⁵ Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin, “Introduction,” Brydon and Tiffin, *Decolonising Fictions* 14.

⁶ Munt, “Introduction” xiii.

Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no-one.⁷

Along with a questioning of the humanist subject, or object, of knowledge in (at least) each of the disciplines mentioned above, there has been an impulse to redefine that object of knowledge. According to Barthes, the new object which belongs to no-one is “the text.”⁸ This redefinition of the object of knowledge, from a reality-fiction opposition in humanist discourses to a poststructuralist orientation to that object as “text,” represents a fundamental shift in the theoretical approach towards that object as “a signifying practice.”⁹

Barthes offers a semiological strategy for reading the object of knowledge, or text. He does so in relation to what he calls the classic text. In Barthesian terms the “‘classic text’ refers not so much to any actual text, but to the model of the classic text which can only be derived from numerous textual instances.”¹⁰ The classic textual model is based on a semiological reading of the signifying practices of a Western humanist system of representation, the cornerstone of which is the humanist subject. To reiterate:

⁷ Barthes qtd. in James Clifford, “Introduction: Partial Truths,” *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1986) 1.

⁸ Barthes, *S/Z* 7.

⁹ Barthes, *S/Z* 7.

¹⁰ Silverman 242.

[T]he terms “individual” and “man” posit an entity that is both autonomous and stable. “Man” presupposes a human essence that remains untouched by historical or cultural circumstances [where] man’s thinking processes are in no way coerced either by the material world or by the thoughts of other men; he is understood to be a free intellectual agent [for whom] ideas correspond in an unmediated way to real objects and values. [Such a conception of language] offers us a narrator who imagines that he speaks without simultaneously being spoken, who believes himself to exist outside of discourse.¹¹

The Western humanist subject is discursively located in a correspondingly logocentric symbolic and cultural order where subjectivity is organised along lines of sexual difference.¹² This view of sexual subjectivity, which has a basis in Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis, proposes a relationship between the prevailing symbolic order and dominant cultural values. In Western cultures both the symbolic order and the cultural order are regarded in most Western poststructuralist discourses as being governed by the Oedipal norm which embeds a paternal hierarchy in the unconscious.¹³ From the premise that there is an intrinsic hierarchical sexual opposition in the structure of the symbolic order, it follows that paternal privilege is repeated in the constitution of subjectivity which

¹¹ Silverman 126-28.

¹² Silverman 125.

¹³ See Silverman 54-86. See also Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, Vol 5. (London: Hogarth, 1955).

is again reflected in the cultural order. In other words, Western sexual and cultural specificity is articulated via the paternal signifier which occupies a privileged position. Western subjectivity is, therefore, first and foremost, patriarchal.¹⁴ By these means the Western subject is fully contained within a predetermined narrative.”¹⁵ This narrative of Western sexual and cultural specificity is not only the cornerstone of the classic humanist text, but also of Western imperialist and colonialist texts to which Barthes’s reading strategy proves both applicable and appropriate.

As the fundamental method of an ideological critique of a Western sexual and cultural system of representation, Barthes’s semiological reading strategy was devised for demystifying the smallest units of signification. Barthes demonstrates that from a reading of numerous textual instances “the [classic] text can be made to express the dominant values of a given historical period.”¹⁶ Classic texts, he argues, can be entered at any point and their ideological structure made intelligible.¹⁷

¹⁴ Silverman 125.

¹⁵ Silverman 136.

¹⁶ Silverman 41. Roland Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 5. Semiology is the term usually used in relation to a European-based tradition. Semiotics is the term more commonly used in a United States-based tradition. Since I am working closely with Barthes’s semiological reading strategy illustrated in *S/Z*, I elect to use the terms semiology and semiological in my own narrative. Where the term semiotics is used it will reflect Kaja Silverman’s United States-based orientation.

¹⁷ In *S/Z* the text is “starred” 13.

Barthes's strategy for demystifying the ideological structure of the classic text involves segmentation of the text into blocks of signification which he terms "lexias."¹⁸ Lexias "are series of brief contiguous fragments [or] units of reading."¹⁹ In contrast to the operation of suture, which stitches signifiers together inducing a forward movement, segmentation divides and separates one signifier from another. These textual interruptions isolate signifying units from each other and "impede linear progression."²⁰ Segmentation, thus, "fragments the structure of the classic text in order to reveal the cultural voices which speak it, the codes which constitute its 'reality.'"²¹ In this way the text is made available as discourse.

Even though classic Western humanist signifying operations attempt to limit the way the text can be read—confining the reader to the predetermined narrative, because everything "signifies ceaselessly and several times,"²² even the logocentric "classic" text is characterized by, what Barthes calls, a "limited plural."²³ Barthes, therefore, argues that because even the classic text is plural, reading

¹⁸ Barthes, *S/Z* 13. In Barthes's project lexias are "sometimes a few words, sometimes several sentences" 13.

¹⁹ Barthes, *S/Z* 13.

²⁰ Silverman 247.

²¹ Silverman 247.

²² Barthes, *S/Z* 12.

²³ Barthes, *S/Z* 8.

“must also be plural.”²⁴ Barthes’s notion of a plural reading is encapsulated in the concept of “rereading.”²⁵ He approaches the question of rereading as follows:

[T]o read is to find meanings, and to find meanings is to name them, but these named meanings are swept towards other names; names call to each other, reassemble, and their groupings call for further naming: I name, I unname, I rename: so the text passes: it is a nomination in the course of becoming a tireless approximation, a metonymic labor.²⁶

Rereading “multiplies [the text] in its variety and plurality: rereading draws the text out of its internal chronology.”²⁷ Barthes suggests that in this process of rereading the reader “participates in an on-going manufacture of meaning.”²⁸ In other words, to read is to consume the text, to reread is to read productively.²⁹

Following on from the process of segmentation, Barthes proposes that the process of reading texts be carried out in relation to five codes which intersect at multiple points producing “woven” texts.³⁰ The codes can be thought as levels of signification. The codes, which provide much of the structure to texts, also

²⁴ Barthes, *S/Z* 15.

²⁵ Barthes, *S/Z* 15.

²⁶ Barthes, *S/Z* 11.

²⁷ Barthes, *S/Z* 16.

²⁸ Silverman 247.

²⁹ The terms reading and rereading are at times used interchangeably. The context should provide the intended meaning.

³⁰ Barthes, *S/Z* 21.

provide the means via which the ideological meaning of the text can be reread. Barthes identifies these codes as the hermeneutic code, which articulates and resolves enigmas; the proairetic code,³¹ which establishes fixed sequences of actions; the semic code,³² which functions to define persons and places; the symbolic code, which establishes unresolvable oppositions; and the cultural codes “which are numerous and heterogeneous [and] to a very large degree subsume all other codes.”³³

Each code, which functions to repeat and reproduce the existing symbolic and cultural order, serves the classic text in particular ways. These codes replicate, organize and naturalize the larger discursive field making it seem timeless and inevitable. Ideological consistency is best served if only a few codes are activated by a given text. Together, and in infinite combinations, codes reveal themselves through the denotative and connotative potential of the signifiers.³⁴

While segmentation is an arbitrary process, it is a process which “bear[s] on the signifier.”³⁵ Signifieds (concepts) acquire meaning only in relationship to other signifieds and signifiers. A signifier (word, sound image, utterance) “is a shifting

³¹ Barthes, *S/Z* draws on “Aristotelian terms, in which *praxis* is linked to *proairesis*, or the ability rationally to determine the result of an action” 18.

³² Silverman 252.

³³ Silverman 241.

³⁴ Barthes, in *The Semiotic Challenge*, claims: “Semiology is what *advenes*: what comes from the Signifier” 4.

³⁵ Barthes, *S/Z* 13.

element” which combines with all other textual elements.³⁶ Meaning emerges through discourse as signifiers are displaced along a signifying chain.³⁷ The signifiers which provide another signifier with its semantic values are referred to, in Barthesian terms, as “semes.”³⁸

In his strategy for rereading the ideological basis of the classic text, Barthes also looks for “the shifting and repetition of the signifieds.”³⁹ In doing so he distinguishes between the denotative and connotative signified. The classic text, he argues, “tends to establish the denotative signified as a privileged and authoritative term.”⁴⁰ While the denotative signified varies between texts, the ultimate privilege is always accorded to the paternal signifier. In classic texts denotation seems both to establish and to close the reading.⁴¹ Barthes’s reading strategy reveals that “denotation is not the first meaning, but it pretends to be so.”⁴²

³⁶ Barthes, *S/Z* 17.

³⁷ In Derridean terms this is the principle of linguistic *différance* which repeats at each step in the process of signification; for example, a signifier (word, sound image, utterance) is constituted via its relationship of *différance* to other signifiers; and again, a signified (concept) is constituted via its relationship of *différance* to other signifieds.

³⁸ Silverman 252.

³⁹ Barthes, *S/Z* 14.

⁴⁰ Silverman 240.

⁴¹ Denotation is characterized by Barthes, in *S/Z*, as “that old deity, watchful, cunning, theatrical, foreordained to *represent* the collective innocence of language” 9.

⁴² Barthes, *S/Z* 9.

Barthes's also argues that the operations of connotation are as critical as those of denotation. Each connotation is, for example, "the starting point of a code ... the articulation of a voice which is woven into the text."⁴³ Connotation is, therefore, simultaneously an invasion and a digression. It is an invasion of the text by a code and a digression away from the text to the larger discursive field, to the symbolic order.⁴⁴ Connotation is, therefore, "a correlation immanent in the text."⁴⁵ This textual correlation to the symbolic order is concealed by the anonymity of the voice, or authority, behind the production of ideological meaning in the classic text.⁴⁶ The overall ideological goal of the connotative signifying operations of the classic text is to "naturalize meaning and thus to give credence to the reality of the story."⁴⁷ In other words, by these means the classic text "purports to be a transcript of a reality which pre-exists and exceeds it."⁴⁸ Kaja Silverman refers to this as the "surreptitious" signifying activity of connotation.⁴⁹

In my lead up to reading the colonialist texts of family, empire, home and nation as they manifest in the writerly text of four novels by Renée, I adapt Barthes's

⁴³ Barthes, *S/Z* 9.

⁴⁴ Silverman 42.

⁴⁵ Barthes, *S/Z* 8. In *S/Z*, Barthes argues that connotation is both successive (read: layered) and agglomerative (read: accumulative) 8.

⁴⁶ Barthes, *S/Z* 9.

⁴⁷ Barthes, *S/Z* 23.

⁴⁸ Silverman 243.

⁴⁹ Silverman 238

strategy for rereading the classic text to a rereading of three classic colonialist texts.⁵⁰ I nominate as classic colonialist texts those texts which are “informed by theories concerning the superiority of [British] culture and the rightness of Empire.”⁵¹ A Barthesian rereading of such texts can reveal the signifying operations of imperialist and colonialist discourses being those discourses which are already reread in the writerly text of the four novels by Renée.

I now introduce grouped segments from each of three texts to be found in *The Empire Annual For Girls*.⁵² My rereading of these three texts demonstrates how colonialist texts signify in relation to the symbolic and cultural authority of the British Empire and how they are structured in accordance with that “reality.”

⁵⁰ Mignolo suggests that a “colonial semiosis” is profitable approach to reading in a colonial context when “issues like race, gender, and class are being taken into account” 126. Mignolo suggests that a colonial semiosis might be useful for reading “the dialectic between official stories and suppressed voices, between signs from different cultural traditions” 129.

⁵¹ Boehmer 3.

⁵² A. R. Buckland, ed. *The Empire Annual for Girls* (4 Bouverie Street: London, 1911).

At this moment there seems to come a special call to women to share in the work that we believe The British Empire is bidden to do for the good of the whole world Girls naturally look forward into life and wonder what it will bring them ... they should all from the first realise the bigness of their position, and see themselves as citizens of a great country, with a great work to do for God in the world We are seeing increasingly in every department of life how much depends upon the home and upon the training given by the mother, and yet it does not seem as if girls as a rule prepared themselves seriously for that high position. The mother should be the first, the chief religious teacher of her children Women who follow their husbands into the distant parts of the earth, and are called to be home-makers in new lands, may find themselves not only compelled to stand alone, but called upon to help maintain the religious life in others To some may come the call to realise what it means to recognise our brotherhood with peoples of other race and other beliefs. Even within our own Empire there are ... countless multitudes waiting for the truth of the gospel to bring light and hope into their lives. [M]ake yourselves ready to hear whatever call may come. There is some service wanted from you; to give that service will be your greatest blessing, your deepest joy It must

⁵³ Mrs Creighton, "To Girls Of The Empire: Words of Encouragement and Stimulus to the Daughters of the Nation," Buckland 39-44.

be done, not for your own gratification, but because you are the followers of One who came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

These grouped segments of Mrs. Creighton *Words of Encouragement and Stimulus to the Daughters of the Nation*, serve to illustrate some of the signifying operations of colonialist discourse which constitute amongst a range of colonialist subject positions, subjectivities contained within a predetermined narrative of the colonialist girl and woman as daughter, mother and wife.

According to Barthes:

A classic narrative always gives this impression: the author first conceives the signified (or the generality) and then finds for it, according to the chance of his imagination, “good” signifiers, probative examples; the classic author is like an artisan bent over the workbench of meaning and selecting the best *expressions* for the concept he has already formed.⁵⁴

In “To Girls Of The Empire” the denotative signified, which is both expressed and reproduced via so-called “good” signifiers and probative examples, is the British Empire. This is achieved through the signifying operations of denotation and connotation in relationship with (at least) the semic code, the proairetic code and the symbolic code. The semic code, defining persons and places, serves this colonialist text by means of (at least) two so-called, true and literal signifieds:

⁵⁴ Barthes, *S/Z* 173.

“God” and “The British Empire.” Together “God” and “The British Empire” constitute the entire denotative sign: a God-fearing British Empire. “Good” signifiers of a God-fearing British Empire are to be found in (at least) the following nouns and adjectival and verbal phrases: “chief religious teacher,” “followers,” “the brotherhood,” “husbands,” “citizens,” “mother,” “girls,” “homemakers,” “other races,” “countless multitudes,” “the good,” “the bigness,” “the training,” “a great work,” “religious life,” “the gospel,” “the truth,” “light,” “hope,” “service,” “gratification.” In the classic text the “theoretical movement away from denotation to connotation,” involves moving away from a signified which always maintains its specificity vis-à-vis the signifier, to one which refers in turn beyond itself.⁵⁵ In this colonialist text “good” signifiers and probative examples of the denotative sign, or signified, a God-fearing British Empire, are connotatively signified by referring beyond that signified to the “blessing” and “joy” to be found not only in the British Empire, but also in “the home.”⁵⁶

In Mrs. Creighton’s text, the proairetic code, which establishes fixed sequences of actions, serves the classic linear narrative in the particular sequencing of events and ideas. Where the British Empire, for example, “is bidden,” and “girls naturally look forward,” the proairetic code makes certain that clusters of events will follow each other in a predictable order. Silverman points out that such “narrative repetition represents a particularly powerful syntagmatic lure.”⁵⁷ Further evidence

⁵⁵ Silverman 42.

⁵⁶ The editorial note which precedes this text argues that Mrs Creighton’s “appeal to the girls of the Empire lays stress on the joy as well as the privilege of service” Buckland 39.

⁵⁷ Silverman 245.

of the operation of the proairetic code, on which the symbolic code depends for its momentum, lies in the following verbal phrases: “a special call, “to share, “we believe,” “it will bring, “should all, “work to do, “see themselves,” “realise,” “how much depends upon,” “the first, “should be, “are called,” “find themselves compelled,” “help maintain,” “waiting for,” “wanted from,” and “make yourselves.”

Because the proairetic code establishes fixed sequences of actions it determines narrative and syntactic progression. Meaning, therefore, emerges only through the temporal, or diachronic, unfolding of a signifying chain. Silverman points out that since meaning “does not pre-exist the syntagmatic alignment of signifiers,” the signified, the British Empire, “*is* that syntagmatic alignment.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, the particular narrative sequencing of these signifiers of the symbolic code exists when and because it can be given a name, “service,” and unfolds as this process of naming takes place.⁵⁹ Such actions “form the main armature of the classic text.”⁶⁰

“Good” signifiers and probative examples of a God-fearing British Empire are also textual manifestations of the symbolic code. The colonialist subjectivities of the girl and woman are constituted via the “good” signifiers of national, domestic, and christian service, signified in the mother’s position as follower of God, of her husband, and as universal home-maker. This affords both mother and daughter

⁵⁸ Silverman 163.

⁵⁹ Barthes, *S/Z* 19.

⁶⁰ Barthes, *S/Z* 255.

sexual citizenship, albeit in the brotherhood of nations. Signified under generic titles for actions such as, training, recognition, and following, what is sequenced and named in this colonialist text is colonialist women's service to God, world, empire, nation, home, family, and to "the countless multitudes."

Barthes refers to the connotative functions of proverbial statements within the structure of the classic text as, potentially, one of the most conspicuous symptoms of symbolic and cultural coding. Silverman draws attention to "the voice within the fiction [which] claims responsibility for the discourse, and thus cover[s] over the cultural enunciation."⁶¹ In "To Girls Of The Empire," Mrs Creighton is the manifest narrator who declares: "Girls naturally look forward into life." The proverbial statement is delivered via the voice (once-removed) of "the One who came." The authority, or voice behind this statement is anonymous which serves to conceal how meaning is produced. Proverbial truths are also sequenced in a linear fashion as Mrs Creighton observes: "We are seeing increasingly in every department of life how much depends upon the home and upon the training given by the mother." The proairetic code also adds momentum to the classic narrative of a colonialist girl's future.

A further aspect of Barthes's semiological strategy for rereading the ideological meaning in classic texts is his emphasis upon the contradictory meanings of each textual element.⁶² When Mrs Creighton asks her readers to "to realise what it

⁶¹ Silverman 244.

⁶² Silverman points out that "the classic text uses oppositions as a major structuring device though these oppositions are rigorously limited in the number that can come into play at any juncture, and in the manner in which they can be articulated" 243.

means to recognise our brotherhood with peoples of other race and other beliefs,” “our brotherhood” implies a relationship of fraternal equality. There is, however, an implicit contradiction in the following and qualifying sentence where the countless multitudes are “waiting for the truth of the gospel to bring light and hope into their lives.” What is presented, on the one hand, as a fraternal relationship is, on the other hand, implicitly signified as a dependency on the gospel (read: God). The denotative signified God (read: the British Empire, nation, man, pater familias) is connotatively signified as divine benefactor of all.

Barthes points out that the classic text can be reread as “a volume of traces in displacement.”⁶³ Displaced traces of the existing cultural and symbolic order can be read via the “the gospel” that women will agree to be spoken through in this colonialist narrative and who will, therefore, extend the chain of imperialist and godly authority to their own daughters. Thus constituted, the female colonialist subject accedes to the terms of the unfolding narrative of blessed and joyful service to “the One,” manifest for those women “who follow their husbands into the distant parts of the earth, and are called to be home-makers in new lands.”

In “To Girls Of The Empire” the symbolic and cultural orders of the British Empire are displaced in a narrative of Christian families home-making in a great country, a home-away-from-home, at the same time as the British Empire is both paradigmatically and syntagmatically reproduced.⁶⁴ In Mrs Creighton’s text the

⁶³ Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge* 7.

⁶⁴ In her exploration of “the dialectic between domesticity and empire,” McClintock finds that the “metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial—the ‘national family,’ the global ‘family of nations,’ the colony as a ‘family of black children ruled over by a white father’—

British Empire can be read as God's house in the colonies. However, Barthes argues: "There is no reason to make denotation the locus and the norm of a primary, original meaning. To do so is to arrange all the meanings of a text in a circle around the hearth of denotation."⁶⁵ In this colonialist text, the British Empire "is not the first meaning, [or Signified] but pretends to be so; [and] under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the *last* of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and to close the reading)."⁶⁶

My adaptation of Barthes's semiological reading strategy has expanded and enriched this colonialist text making visible a colonialist discourse in which British imperialist patronage to "girls," "women," and "the countless multitudes," is signified as gift. I reread imperialist patronage as (discursive) theft. In the process of rereading this colonialist text access is also provided to "the processes of meaning by which the bourgeoisie converts its historical class-culture in universal nature."⁶⁷

My reading of grouped segments taken from a second colonialist text further illustrates the Barthesian principle that connotation, in its "surreptitious" form, is an ideological agent in the text.

depended ... on the prior naturalizing of the social subordination of women and children within the domestic sphere ... A woman's *political* relation to the nation was thus subinerged as a *social* relation to a man through marriage. For women, citizenship in the nation was mediated by the marriage relation within the family" 357-58.

⁶⁵ Barthes, *S/Z* 7.

⁶⁶ Barthes, *S/Z* 9.

⁶⁷ Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge* 5.

Such a Treasure! How a New Zealand girl found her true calling, by Eileen O'Connell.⁶⁸

“Evelyne, come to my room before you go to your singing lesson. I have had a most important letter from your father; the New Zealand mail came in this morning”.... A few minutes later the door opened, and [Mrs Trevor] turned to the young girl, who with a song on her lips danced merrily into the room. At the sight of Mrs Trevor’s face she stopped suddenly, exclaiming, “Something is wrong! What has happened?”

“You are right, Eva, something has happened—something, my child, that will affect your whole life ... You are to leave me, Evelyne, and go out to New Zealand. You are needed in your father’s house.”

“To New Zealand?—I refuse to go.”

“You have no choice in the matter, dearest.”

“To live in an uncivilised country, where probably the people won’t speak my own language —”

“Don’t betray such absurd ignorance, Eva ... you must know that New Zealand is a British colony, inhabited mainly by our own people, who are as well educated and as well mannered as ourselves.”.... Six weeks later, Eva landed at Wellington [where] she was a treasure to her father ... hav[ing] learned now to see [herself] with other eyes than [her] own.

⁶⁸ Eileen O'Connell, “Such a Treasure! How a New Zealand girl found her true calling,” *Buckland* 120-30.

In the classic text the hermeneutic code is entrusted with the responsibility of formulating, articulating and resolving enigmas. Silverman argues:

Because the hermeneutic code moves toward disclosure, it, like the semic code, projects a stable subject about whom things can ultimately be discovered although the process may be painstaking and full of delays—a subject, in short, who can be defined and known.⁶⁹

In the classic text the hermeneutic code “finds expression through half-sentences, questions, and silences as well as through narrative delay or equivocation.”⁷⁰ In “Such a Treasure!” an enigma is connotatively signified in “the sight of Mrs Trevor’s face.” Eva exclaims: “Something is wrong! What has happened?” Mrs Trevor agrees: “You are right, Eva, something has happened—something, my child, that will affect your whole life.” Things are, enigmatically, both right and wrong. Eva responds to this contradiction: “I refuse to go.” Eva’s resistance to her location in the symbolic and cultural orders of the British Empire, briefly intervenes in the ideological consistency in this colonialist text. Here, the hermeneutic code which operates in tandem with the semic code, serves “to inscribe and re-inscribe [Eva’s] culturally determined position.”⁷¹ Mrs Trevor states: “You have no choice in the matter, dearest.” Eva’s resistance is sealed off by the classic deployment of the semic code in naming Eva “dearest.” The classic

⁶⁹ Silverman 262.

⁷⁰ Silverman 250-51.

⁷¹ Silverman 262.

text thereby recovers itself: “Six weeks later, Eva [“dearest”] landed at Wellington.” Connotation is a surreptitious agent of ideology: Eva “dearest” has acceded to patriarchal nomination as “a treasure to her father.” In acceding to her status as a domestic treasure, Eva finds herself “at home in those discourses and institutions which define the current symbolic order in the [British Empire].”⁷²

There is further connotative potential to be read from the signifier “treasure” which also functions as a metaphor in this colonialist text. Barthes points out that metaphor exploits relationships of conceptual similarity.⁷³ David Lloyd describes this as a process of “predicative *assimilation* [which] involves the bringing together of two elements into identity in such a manner that their differences are suppressed.”⁷⁴ In metaphor the more privileged of the terms remains hidden; it falls to the position of the signified, while the other functions as its signifier, or representative within the text.⁷⁵ The metaphor “treasure” involves two elements: profit and loss. What is assimilated and falls to the position of the signified, is profit. What functions as its signifier and is left over as residue and subordinated in the wider text, is loss.

⁷² Silverman 141.

⁷³ Silverman 110. David Lloyd, “Race under Representation,” *Oxford Literary Review* 13 (1991) refers to metaphor as “a minimal narrative of identity” 72.

⁷⁴ Lloyd 72-73.

⁷⁵ For Lloyd, the important question with regard to metaphor is “not what it signifies, but how it signifies within the larger matrix of cultural elements” 72.

The terms “subject” and “signification” are at all points interdependent.⁷⁶ The colonialist girl is an asset from which the empire profits. Within an economy of profit and loss the colonialist girl, like the indigenous colonised, is also an exploitable asset. As a “treasure” the female colonialist subject is both coloniser (signified) and colonised (signifier). Where colonisation is predicated on learning to see with eyes other than one’s own, the colonialist girl recognises herself “within the mirror of the reigning ideology even if h[er] economic status place[s] h[er] in contradiction to it.”⁷⁷ Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson make the point that the female colonialist subject is “a site upon which contending, but also mutually affirming, systems of domination meet: the female settler is simultaneously an object of patriarchy and an agent of imperial racism.”⁷⁸

Further contradictions inherent in colonialist discourse can be read via a third colonialist text which I came across when I was looking for *The Exploding Frangipani: Lesbian Writing from Australia and New Zealand* in the New Zealand section of The University of Waikato library.⁷⁹ On an adjoining shelf dozens of volumes of the *Empire Annual For Girls* with their regally-emblematic, gold-embossed covers took my eye. My first glance at one of these volumes revealed

⁷⁶ Silverman 194.

⁷⁷ Silverman 141. In other words, it is from within the symbolic order of the British Empire that the coloniser has the authority to signify. The colonised is, therefore, subject to the symbolic and cultural authority of the coloniser, or signified. The colonised is, therefore, a signifier of the symbolic and cultural authority of the coloniser or signified, the British Empire.

⁷⁸ Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, “Conclusion: Reading difference,” *De-Scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and textuality*, eds. Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (London: Routledge, 1994) 231.

⁷⁹ Cathie Dunsford and Susan Hawthorne eds., *The Exploding Frangipani: Lesbian Writing From Australia and New Zealand* (Auckland: New Women’s, 1990).

tissue separating text from a colour-plate of “Rosalind’s Race for Life,” which depicts a white woman fleeing in fear of a “marauding Redskin.”⁸⁰

Dhairyam argues: “Dominant cultural discourses ally “whiteness” with “masculinity.”⁸¹ This occurs in a closed system of signification where male and female acquire meaning through their opposition to one another, and where the privileged subject in a Western humanist system of representation is (already) sexed-gendered-sexualised-classed-raced (variously) male-masculine-hetero-bourgeoisie-white. In “Rosalind’s Race for Life,” the colonised, predaceous Redskin is feminised and sexed-incontinent in relation to a masculinised, sexed-continent coloniser.⁸² In this colonialist text “the muted object who must be discovered to be known, [this] native occupies the dumb center in historical narratives of gender and sexuality.”⁸³

Contradictions inherent in colonialist discourse can be further elucidated by returning to the metaphor of colonisation. Colonisation is *already* a metaphor

⁸⁰ “Rosalind’s Race for Life,” Buckland iv. The text which accompanies the colour plate is by Lucie E. Jackson, “A Race for Life: How a plucky girl averted a terrible danger from marauding Redskins,” Buckland 66-73. Marie de Lepervanche, “Women, Nation and the State in Australia,” *Woman-Nation-State*, eds. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval Davis (London: The Macmillan Press, 1989) finds that in Australian literature of this era “black and yellow men posed a threat to virtuous white women” 42.

⁸¹ Dhairyam 35.

⁸² Philip Holden, “China Men: Writing the British Nation in Malaya,” *Span* 38 (1994): 68. Holden argues that “putatively national and nominally masculine virtues of emotional and somatic continence ... are reinforced in late British colonialist popular fiction through the comparison of male protagonist with Others of gender and race” 68. Holden points out that the identity of British men is “established against a background of sexually incontinent memsahibs and a feminized indigenous population” 68.

⁸³ Dhairyam 35.

which involves two elements: coloniser and colonised. What is assimilated and falls to the position of the signified is the element coloniser. What is disassimilated, functions as its signifier and is left over as residue and subordinated in the wider text, is the element colonised. In a closed system of signification where male and female acquire meaning through their opposition to one another, the metaphor of colonisation is (already) predicated on the privileged subjectivity of the signified. What is suppressed in the metaphor of colonisation is the signifier: sexed-gendered-sexualised-classed-raced variously female-feminine-homo-proletariat-black. To deploy the metaphor of *woman as colonised* is, therefore, to disassimilate woman in the metaphor of colonisation.⁸⁴ Women and colonised peoples share more than parallel experiences. In colonialist discourses there is already a shared and dynamic linguistic contingency between *woman as coloniser*, *woman as colonised*, and *indigenous colonised peoples*. It is a contingency fraught with contradictions. Reread in this way, colonialist subjectivities are (already) textual embodiments of a discursive syzygy; a conjoining of discourses (already and variously) sexed-gendered-sexualised-classed-raced.

My rereading of these three colonialist texts by no means exhausts either their inherent signifying diversity or their connotative potential. My rereading has, however, produced a rich yield of signifiers and metaphors which reveal their ideological bases in a Western symbolic and cultural order. Here the British Empire is signified both metaphorically and metonymically (paradigmatically and

⁸⁴ See, for example, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 177.

syntagmatically) in a signifying chain leading from God's house, the father's house, the wife, the mother, the daughter, to the countless multitudes. Along that same signifying chain a range of subjectivities are variously signified (read: discursively colonised) in textual opposition to the coloniser. What is revealed in this signifying process is that "the countless multitudes" are among the disassimilated signifiers (the colonised) to the assimilated signifieds, which sometimes includes the female colonialist subject (as coloniser).

My rereadings have demonstrated the Barthesian principle that "there can be no transcendental signified, only provisional [signifieds] which function in turn as signifiers."⁸⁵ My rereadings also reveal what can now be expected from a rereading of colonialist texts: that is, a startling degree of cultural overdetermination,⁸⁶ whereby the symbolic and cultural orders of the British Empire are reproduced relatively unambiguously in readiness for direct (hetero-colonialist) cultural consumption. Here, the British Empire is signified in ways which constitute, amongst other objectives, a white, God-fearing normative hetero-textuality. What is constituted in this process is "a Literature of the Signified."⁸⁷ In this same process colonialist subjectivities, being subjectivities imbued with the superiority of British culture and the rightness of Empire, are constituted. Colonialist discourses and colonialist subjectivities are, therefore,

⁸⁵ Silverman 246.

⁸⁶ Silverman 249.

⁸⁷ Barthes, *S/Z* 9.

mutually implicated in the constitution of a colonialist literature of which these classic colonialist texts are exemplary.

McClintock identifies one of the governing themes of Western Imperialism as “the emergence of a new global order of cultural knowledge.”⁸⁸ Tiffin and Lawson argue that “it is when the children of the colonies read such texts and internalize their own subjection that the true work of colonial[ist] textuality is done.”⁸⁹

Lauris Edmond recalls the constitution of her own subjectivity within a colonialist cultural heritage:

At school I believed everything I was told the British had come to New Zealand to make us all British citizens and subjects of the King [M]any New Zealanders spoke of England as Home, even if, like my parents, they had no actual home to go to on the other side of the world But Home was there all the same, as an institution, a dream, a refuge, a model. All my reading was of English families What an English child I was At school Maoris were a subject What happened in England was *true* Our textbooks were written in the early years of the twentieth century; objectivity about Britain and its Empire lay in the social science-dominated future If anything made me a living cell in the body British it was the grave, semi-military, robustly healthy rituals of obedience that Girl Guide membership required “the average New Zealander” ... meant of course

⁸⁸ McClintock 3.

⁸⁹ Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, “Introduction: The Textuality of Empire,” Tiffin and Lawson 4.

British settlers The British Empire was the “greatest and strongest World Power ever known in history”.... Smugness indeed was my inheritance.⁹⁰

In her testimony to the processes of British textual imperialism, Edmond draws attention to the connotative signifiers “Home,” “subjects,” “citizen.” In addition, Edmond emphasises the part played by a Western humanist social science in the discursive constitution of colonialist subjectivities. The ritual signifying practices deployed in the training of teenage girls in obedience to the symbolic and cultural order of the British Empire is also significant.

Dorothy Jones also recounts the place of fiction in the constitution of her own colonialist subjectivity in New Zealand:

England— “This precious stone set in the silver sea”—was a literary creation, a work of fiction, part of a storybook world ... it was a fiction endowed with considerable authority [where] *real* history happened centre stage twelve thousand miles away Having grown up an unwitting daughter of the Empire, I went to study at Oxford, its imperial heart, to discover that I had been constructed as a colonial[ist] subject It is not, perhaps, possible to “unbecome” a daughter of Empire.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Lauris Edmond, “Membership of the Club,” Chew and Rutherford 73-76.

⁹¹ Dorothy Jones, “The Antipodes of Empire,” Chew and Rutherford 82-84.

Jones links the storybook world of her childhood with a centre-stage imperialist symbolic and cultural authority. This authority is embodied in Jones's colonialist subjectivity (read: reality) as an "unwitting daughter of Empire." Both Edmond and Jones lend implicit testimony to Boehmer's argument that to "assume control over a territory or a nation was not only to exert political or economic power; it was also to have an imaginative command."⁹² Tiffin and Lawson also argue that that: "Imperial relations may have been established initially by guns, guile and disease, but they were maintained in their interpellative stage largely by textuality,"⁹³ which all lends support to my own thesis that colonisation is not only material, but also discursive in its multiple operations and effects.

In Chapter One I asserted the merits of a poststructuralist approach to the discursive constitution of lesbian subjectivities in postcolonial contexts. In this chapter I have argued and demonstrated how a poststructuralist semiological approach to classic (read: humanist) colonialist texts can reveal the signifying imperatives of colonialist discourses in the constitution of colonialist subjectivities, including sexual subjectivities. It is my thesis that a semiological reading strategy can be productively applied to lesbian texts written in signifying relationships to a variety of colonialist discourses revealing, amongst a range of signifying operations, the discursive constitution of colonialist subjectivities as

⁹² Boehmer 5.

⁹³ Tiffin and Lawson, "Introduction" 3.

well as colonialist subjectivities discursively reconstituted in relationship to postcolonial contexts, including the postcolonial text of lesbian subjectivity. This latter task is achieved in the writerly text of four novels by Renée.

The co-productive possibility for reading the postcolonial text of lesbian subjectivity in four novels by Renée is demonstrated in Part Two. The opportunity for pursuing that possibility was however, predicated on a prior knowledge of the existence of what might be termed a New Zealand lesbian literature, as part of which the four novels by Renée could be counted. In the next chapter I make visible a New Zealand lesbian literature which remains largely unacknowledged, due to the multiple effects of colonialist discourses including the continuing presence of a colonialist literary aesthetic operating in the postcolonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

CHAPTER THREE

READING NEW ZEALAND LESBIAN LITERATURE

In Chapter One I traced the largely twentieth-century development of a lesbian literature *per se* as a response to a variety of social, legal and scientific prohibitions which manifested in the politically-based assertion of realist lesbian identities in its fictions. These same politics, which were reflected in the theoretical and methodological grounds of a variety of lesbian literary critical practices, have been subject to intense debate as outlined in Chapter One.

By comparison, the political, cultural and material circumstances underpinning a lesbian literature produced in the postcolonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand are largely uncharted. Indeed, the very existence of a lesbian literature produced in the postcolonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand is overlooked even in places where it could be subject to timely and thorough research; most notably in New Zealand university departments which undertake the teaching of a range of literatures, including the postcolonial.¹

In this chapter I endeavour to indicate, albeit briefly, some of the more and less favourable material and political circumstances under which a New Zealand lesbian literature has been produced. These are, assuredly, topics worthy of more thorough investigation. It is not, however, the task of this thesis to review the vast

¹ In the introductory chapter of this thesis I drew attention to the lack of recognition of a New Zealand lesbian literature indicated by the question asked of me by a New Zealand university English department academic: "Is there a New Zealand lesbian literature?"

and complex range of political, cultural and material conditions underpinning the production of a New Zealand lesbian literature. It is my contention that one of the primary tasks is, by some means and in a broadly defined way, to make this literature visible. Once this literature has been identified, the way is open for the more thorough exploration of the circumstances of its production. Since there exists a need not only for the beginning of an understanding of the political, cultural and material conditions of the production of a New Zealand lesbian literature, but also a need for an understanding of the circumstances of its dissemination and critical reception, I will also, albeit briefly, indicate some of these circumstances in my review of this literature.

In 1990 Annamarie Jagose commented:

There was a time when lesbian literature was a foreign commodity, an exotic product brought in from overseas. With the recent publication of the beginnings of a local and even indigenous lesbian literature it is finally dropping its foreign accent for a more recognisable pronunciation.²

A broadly defined, widely constituted New Zealand lesbian literature has, however, been in existence for some time prior to 1990, though it is widely ignored even by contemporary commentators on lesbian literature. In an address to

² Annamarie Jagose, "Local accents," rev. of *Willy Nilly*, by Renée, and *Tahuri*, by Ngahua Te Awekotuku, *Listener and TV Times* 16 July 1990: 112.

the participants of the “*Man To Man* Lesbian and Gay Writers Festival,”³ Julie Glamuzina commented on the diverse constitution of New Zealand lesbian writing. In her view it consists of,

slogans, banners, leaflets, speeches, press releases, posters, graffiti, protest march placards, letters to the editor, letters to members of parliament, letters to employers and school principals, carvings in school desks, notes passed in class, interviews with the media, pamphlets, inter-office memos, research papers, conference papers, e-mail and internet communications, T-shirt slogans, letters and diaries.⁴

By drawing attention to covert, as well as overt forms of lesbian written expression, Glamuzina indicated that “because it arises out of the conditions of lesbian existence, there is a parallel history of this writing being suppressed, changed, ignored, appropriated, colonised, hidden, mutilated, silenced, wasted.”⁵ In this

³ This writing festival held at Auckland Teachers College, Auckland, 24-26 June 1995, was sponsored by *Man To Man: New Zealand National Gay Community Newspaper* (Auckland: Cornerstone Publications Ltd.).

⁴ Julie Glamuzina, “An Historical Perspective,” an address given at the “*Man To Man* Lesbian and Gay Writers Festival,” Auckland Teachers College, Auckland, 24 June 1995.

⁵ Glamuzina, “An Historical Perspective.” See also *Out Front: Lesbian Political Activity in 1962 to 1983* (Hamilton: Lesbian Press, 1993) a non-fiction publication compiled and self-published by Julie Glamuzina via Lesbian Press in 1993. *Out Front* is a chronological account of lesbian involvement in national political issues. Lesbian periodicals are used in the recuperation of New Zealand lesbian history, including literary history. Glamuzina also indexes a range of New Zealand lesbian feminist publications as well as unpublished interviews with poets and activists, and unpublished political essays from this period. Glamuzina comments on resistance from within the collective of *Broadsheet: New Zealand's feminist magazine* to publishing articles on lesbian feminist politics and lesbianism in New Zealand, 29. Glamuzina notes that the “first known attempt to start a lesbian political group was about 1963 when some Wellington lesbians placed an advertisement in a local newspaper inviting any interested women to contact the Radclyffe Hall Memorial Society” 14. Glamuzina records the opening in 1976 of Daybreak Bookshop, Dunedin, the first New Zealand feminist bookshop to stock lesbian books. This bookshop closed in 1982. Glamuzina also claims that the “first [New Zealand] gay publication was a two-page cyclostyled newsletter put out on

chapter I make some efforts to render some New Zealand lesbian literature more visible. In this endeavour I have undertaken a comprehensive, though not exhaustive, overview of New Zealand lesbian fiction published over approximately the last twenty five years. I take lesbian fiction to include short fiction, poetry, plays and novels. I have listed works together in relation to these sub-genres and have also applied an approximate chronology to my register.

That fiction is lesbian is sometimes made visible by the publication title. Otherwise, where writers are named in the context of my overview, each of them has made public in some way a lesbian self-identification in relation to her published work and/or to her public life. This self-identification has sometimes been through biographical information published alongside a writer's work, though a number of other conditions have made lesbian identification possible. I would emphasize that it has not been my intention to 'out' any writer who had not already done so on her own behalf.⁶ Nor is this overview intended to catalogue any one writer's complete list of published works. As I neither delineate nor define a discrete New Zealand lesbian literature, I refrain from imposing a further definition on my coverage of New Zealand lesbian fiction.

May 8, 1972 by the newly-formed Auckland Gay liberation Front," 67. See also Julie Glamuzina and Alison Laurie, *Parker and Hulme: A Lesbian View* (1994 New Women's Press, 1994).

⁶ In the context of the lesbian and gay liberation movements of the twentieth century, being "out" refers to a rejection of "the closet" in favour of a visible locus of political and cultural activism. In other contexts "outing" has been made mandatory. "Outing" is a way of expressing what Randy Shilts calls, "the deeper intolerance many gay radicals held toward anyone, heterosexual or homosexual, who did not subscribe to their rigid ideology" qtd. in Paul Berman, "Democracy and Homosexuality," *The New Republic* 20 Dec. (1993): 27. Mandatory "outing" as a political strategy, has its contemporary locus in the United States and consists of the naming of public officials, celebrities and other people of political influence as homosexuals, with the political aim of forcing individuals to acknowledge the advantages they obtain from those who have risked the dangers of coming out and to force these same individuals to face up to the responsibilities identified by the homosexual communities which claim them.

In drawing attention to circumstances which attach to some of these publications it is not my intention to reflect either the merits or otherwise of any particular work. The material circumstances to which I have drawn attention include opportunities for publishing in lesbian-only contexts; access to lesbian-only publications; self-publishing and co-publication initiatives; overseas publication, distribution and international review opportunities; and national arts funding bodies support to writers and to New Zealand publishers of New Zealand lesbian fiction. Many of the circumstances, both favourable and unfavourable, attached to the production, publication and dissemination of New Zealand lesbian fiction may well be attached to other literatures emerging in late twentieth-century New Zealand. But it is my contention that a New Zealand lesbian literature, labouring under the aegis of a colonialist literary aesthetic, is affected in particular ways in its opportunity for an informed critical reception. I address this concern in Chapter Four. In the absence of a prior comprehensive written record, what follows is an attempt to identify writing that may be considered constitutive of a New Zealand lesbian literature.

A widely constituted New Zealand lesbian literature also includes non-fiction. In so far as non-fiction by New Zealand lesbian writers constitutes a parallel and supporting literature to New Zealand lesbian fiction, some of this published non-fiction is acknowledged in this chapter by footnotes and references.⁷ Since the late

⁷ For example, Marilyn Waring, well known as the parliamentarian who brought down the New Zealand national party government in 1984, has been a key figure and role model in feminist and lesbian political circles in New Zealand since the 1970s. Her publications include: *Women and Liberty: a global perspective* (Petone: Price Milburn for the N. Z. Council for Civil Liberties, 1982), *Women, Politics and Power: essays* (Wellington: Unwin Paperbacks, Port Nicolson Press, 1985), *War: the foundation of the world's economy* (Auckland: N. Z. Foundation for Peace Studies, 1987), *Counting For Nothing* (Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1988), *Women in*

1960s New Zealand lesbian periodicals and newsletters have published political debate as well as minutiae pertaining to the cultural and political concerns of rural and urban New Zealand lesbian communities.⁸ Many of the earlier New Zealand lesbian periodicals were originally intended for exclusive circulation within lesbian communities.⁹ The self-imposed constraint on dissemination reflects a climate of at best uncertainty, at worst hostility, towards New Zealand lesbian cultures at that time. This constraint also reflects a strategic withdrawal from a wider women's liberation movement with the objective of setting specifically lesbian political and

Parliamentary Life: 1970-1990 (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1994), and *Three Masquerades: essays on equality, work and (hu)man rights* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996). Prue Hyman's *Women and Economics: A New Zealand feminist perspective* (Bridget Williams Books, 1994) is major contribution to the study of the place of women in the New Zealand economy.

⁸ I am using periodicals as a composite term to include community information bulletins as well as publications which consist of political or scholarly articles. For a comprehensive listing of, and index to the content of United States lesbian periodicals beginning with *Vice Versa* (Los Angeles, Ca., 1947) see Clare Potter, ed. and comp., *The Lesbian Periodicals Index* (Naiad Press Inc., 1986).

⁹ New Zealand lesbian community periodicals and newsletters, many of which are held by Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand, include: *Against All Odds* (Dunedin), *Ascent*, *Behind Enemy Lines*, *Bifocal* (Christchurch), *Bi-lines* (Wellington), *Bitches, Witches and Dykes*, *Bookshop News* (Wellington), *Capital New Zealand Aids Foundation Newsletter*, *Circle* (also known as *Lesbian Feminist Circle*), *Country Dykes Delight* (Takaka), *Dunedin Women's Resource Centre Newsletter*, *Dungles* (Dunedin), *Dyke Divulsions*, *Dyke News* (Auckland), *Express: New Zealand's Newspaper of Gay Expression*, *Gala* (Dunedin) supersedes *Dungles*, *Gay Health Workers Alliance Newsletter*, *Gay Publishing Collective*, *Gay Lib News Auckland* superseded by *Gay Liberator*, *Gay Liberation Front* (Christchurch) superseded by *Aequus*, *Gay Liberation Front* (Wellington), *Gay Task Force*, *Gay Teachers Union*, *Glad Rag* (Wellington), *Hamilton Lesbians Newsletter*, *Hera: Help Erase Repressive Attitudes*, *Juno*, *K.G. Club Newsletter*, *Laetus Social Club Newsletter*, *Lesbian and Gay Rights Resource Centre Newsletter*, *LIP: Lesbians In Print*, *Lesbians Newsletter*, *Lesbians in the Public Service Newsletter*, *LORC: Newsletter of Lesbians of Rape Crisis*, *Magra: Manawatu Gay Rights Association Newsletter*, *Man To Man: New Zealand National Gay Community Newspaper* superseded by *Express*, *National Gay Rights Coalition of New Zealand*, *Open door gay/lesbian welfare group*, *Otago Gaily Times*, *Rainbow Times* (Taranaki), *Sapphic Star*, *Tamaki Makaurau Lesbian Newsletter*, *Taranaki Lesbian Newsletter*, *Wellington Lesbian (Network) Newsletter* superseded by *Lesbian Quarterly*, *Wellington Women's Resource Centre Newsletter*. A number of these periodicals served both lesbian and gay communities. Periodicals also held by LAGANZ which reflect a more generally gay male and queer youth content include: *Big Ted and Manu Rainbow Youth Newsletter*, *Magra*, *Pink Express*, *Pink Triangle*, *Wanganui Gay Rights Group* and *Wanganui Gay Rights Newsletter*. This list is not exhaustive. It provides an insight into the geographical coverage of New Zealand lesbian community bulletins.

cultural agenda during this period.¹⁰ These periodicals also contain lesbian perspectives on the political concerns of more widely constituted political and cultural communities in New Zealand, most notably issues relating to The Treaty of Waitangi, the Springbok rugby tour of New Zealand in 1981, and homosexual law reform in New Zealand.¹¹

Many of these community periodicals are currently held in the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand, housed in the Alexander Turnbull Library, at The National Library of New Zealand, Wellington.¹² LAGANZ policy on access to these periodicals is guided by the specifications attached to these publications. Access is, therefore, granted to most of these resources on the basis of one's sexual orientation.¹³ The implication is *only a lesbian should do it*. Alison Laurie argues

¹⁰ The back cover blurb to Clare Potter's *The Lesbian Periodicals Index* refers to the "burning issues" of American lesbian communities.

¹¹ In 1985-86, the years in which the Homosexual Law Reform Bill to legalise male homosexuality was contested in the New Zealand parliament, "coming out" was an act of both personal courage and political commitment. The Homosexual Law Reform Bill was passed into law against highly organised opposition including a petition intended to survey every member of every household in New Zealand, for which over eight hundred thousand signatures were collected, and which was presented to government officials on the steps of parliament in an orchestrated display of nationalist and Christian allegiance. Alison Laurie, "From Kamp Girls to Political Dykes: Finding the Others through 30-odd Years," *Finding The Lesbians: Personal Accounts From Around The World*, eds. Julia Penelope and Sarah Valentine (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1990) describes this event as a "Nuremberg (sic)-style rally with god, the family and our colonial flags waving while anthems were sung" 83. See also *Out Law: A Legal Guide for Lesbians and Gay Men in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland Lesbian and Gay Lawyers Group Inc., 1994).

¹² The LAGANZ collections were established in 1977. LAGANZ also holds unpublished correspondence, manuscripts, personal papers, letters and ephemera of the kind noted by Glamuzina, "Historical Perspective." LAGANZ curator Phil Parkinson points out that the LAGANZ Trust has established a kaupapa for the collection and preservation of taonga Maori which reflect Maori conceptions of gay and lesbian identities. Parkinson, "Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand (LAGANZ)," *Sites* 25 (1992), argues that "lesbian and gay sexual identity cannot be properly studied without a broader context which compares other identities and orientations" 138. The collecting policy of LAGANZ is subject to periodic review.

¹³ Lesbian community libraries which grant exclusive access to lesbians are LILAC, a lesbian lending library in Wellington, and the Auckland Women's Centre Library. The "Waxing Moon Lesbian Archives Catalogue" compiled by Zoe Catherine Alice, lists materials relating to lesbian

against the wider circulation of “[m]aterial drawn from ‘lesbian only’ magazines and newsletters,” and in favour of “[h]istorical and contemporary research on lesbians in Aotearoa/New Zealand.”¹⁴ Compounding the contradiction in this statement is Laurie’s contention that “the greatest threat to all women is the suppression of knowledge about lesbians.”¹⁵ These periodicals remain largely unutilised outside of lesbian-only contexts.

To the best of my knowledge the content of these periodicals has not been publicly registered in any comprehensive way beyond the subject-author index implemented by LAGANZ. Early restrictions placed on their access and usage, by well-meaning guardians of New Zealand lesbian and lesbian separatist communities, were a response to social and political conditions which no longer prevail. The present-day low utilisation of these periodicals is due, in part, to an outdated lesbian community siege-mentality.¹⁶ It is my contention that increased access to, and utilisation of these periodicals would serve to inform and enrich an already burgeoning New Zealand lesbian literary culture, as well as contribute to its being more widely acknowledged as a constituent of New Zealand literature *per se*.

culture, politics, and literature gathered by Alice from 1981-1985. This is a personal archive for which Alice is seeking another location in the hope that this will increase its access by lesbians.

¹⁴ Alison Laurie, “Teaching Lesbian Studies,” *Feminist Voices: Womens’ Studies Texts for New Zealand*, ed. Rosemary Du Plessis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) 54-55.

¹⁵ Alison Laurie, “Lesbian Worlds,” *Public and Private Worlds: Women in Contemporary New Zealand*, ed. Sheila Cox (Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1987) 156.

¹⁶ Such a limitation imposed on access to, and wider dissemination of these writings highlights “the closet” as a figure of simultaneous lesbian cultural production and prohibition. See Sedgwick “Epistemology.”

Since their inception New Zealand lesbian periodicals and newsletters have been a primary publishing outlet for New Zealand lesbian short fiction and poetry. *The Circle* was the lesbian publication of the Sisters of Homophile Equality or S.H.E.,¹⁷ an autonomous group begun in Christchurch in 1973 which aimed to increase awareness of women's oppression both inside and outside the Gay Movement.¹⁸ *The Circle* was first published in Wellington in 1973, and in 1977 it was renamed *Lesbian-feminist Circle*, continuing then through to 1985.¹⁹ For thirteen years *Circle* provided an important avenue as a published record of a local lesbian culture, and for the dissemination of this record to local lesbian communities. *Circle* regularly published poetry, short fiction and book reviews.

New Zealand Gay News, produced by the Gay Publishing Collective, operative between 1975 and 1977, supported a lesbian and gay literary culture by publishing local short fiction and poetry.²⁰ Reflecting a separatist stance, *Dyke News* issued a policy statement that it was a publication by lesbians, for lesbians. Its editors argued that lesbianism is about and between women, having nothing to do with men: "For this reason we ask that *Dyke News* not be made available for men to read."²¹ *Dyke News* regularly published poetry.²²

¹⁷ *The Circle* (Wellington: Herstory Press) registered at Post Office Headquarters, Wellington, as a magazine in 1973, was a monthly publication. Glamuzina, in *Out Front*, points out that the first issue of *Circle* "was distributed in public bars and in the streets to whoever was interested—men and women" 49.

¹⁸ S.H.E. was responsible for organising the first New Zealand gay feminist conference in 1974.

¹⁹ With the regular publication of *Circle* editorial branches were opened in Whangarei, Hamilton, Wairoa, Mangakino, Palmerston North, Napier, New Plymouth, Rotorua, Gisborne, and Dunedin.

²⁰ *New Zealand Gay News* (Auckland: Gay Publishing Collective, P.O. Box 835).

²¹ Editorial, *Dyke News* Oct. 1983: 1.

Lesbian Newsletter promoted local lesbian cultural production in a number of ways. A lesbian feminist book circle was advertised.²³ There was a “Call for submissions” to a lesbian anthology by Cathie Dunsford.²⁴ Notice was given of a “Lesbian Writers’ Group.”²⁵ There was also a “Call for contributions to a lesbian issue of *Spiral*.”²⁶ *Bitches, Witches and Dykes: a women’s liberation newspaper* was first published in August 1980. Six issues were produced until it ceased publication in 1982.²⁷ *Bitches, Witches and Dykes* was a regular outlet for political commentary, short fiction and poetry. *Taranaki Lesbian Newsletter* regularly promoted the “Local lesbian library at ‘The Sheila’s Arms.’”²⁸

A more publicly accessible New Zealand lesbian fiction is characterised by a range of self-publishing initiatives, independent publishing initiatives and mainstream publications.²⁹ *Broadsheet: New Zealand’s feminist magazine* has been a major avenue for the publication of short fiction and poetry, as well as

²² There was a call for submissions for a book of experiences of being a lesbian in New Zealand. See “Lesbians Down Under,” *Dyke News* Feb. 1983: 4-5. This material remains unpublished.

²³ Advertisement, *Lesbians Newsletter* 20 (1991): 20

²⁴ “Call for submissions,” *Lesbians Newsletter* Dec. 1989: 30. This call for submissions resulted in the publication of *The Exploding Frangipani*, Dunsford and Hawthorne.

²⁵ “Lesbian Writers Group,” *Lesbians Newsletter* 14 (1990): 16.

²⁶ “Call for contributions to a lesbian issue of *Spiral*,” *Lesbians Newsletter* 17 (1991): 2-4.

²⁷ *Bitches, Witches and Dykes: a women’s liberation newspaper* (Auckland: Feminist Publications, P.O. Box 68-570 Newton) was registered at the General Post Office in Wellington as a magazine in 1980.

²⁸ “Local lesbian library at ‘The Sheila’s Arms,’” *Taranaki Lesbian Newsletter* Apr. 1993: 1. *Taranaki Lesbian Newsletter* [New Plymouth] followed an earlier Taranaki lesbian newsletter circa 1982.

²⁹ For the purposes of this thesis the term mainstream refers to a generalized literary milieu including publishing opportunities and avenues for critical review.

political and social commentary since 1972.³⁰ It was circulated widely throughout New Zealand feminist and lesbian communities and was also available to the general public. *Broadsheet* produced a lesbian issue in June 1973 which encouraged readership beyond the boundaries of lesbian communities.³¹ A selection of its content introduced by editor Pat Rosier, is republished in *Been Around For Quite A While: Broadsheet*.³²

New Zealand lesbian literature is also constituted, in part, by short works of fiction and poetry collected in a range of literary anthologies. The wider circulation of earlier New Zealand lesbian short works of fiction and poetry was largely facilitated by *Spiral: Women's Arts Magazine*, which first appeared in 1976.³³ *Spiral 7: A Collection of Lesbian Art and Writing from Aotearoa New Zealand*, edited by Heather McPherson, Julie King, Marian Evans and Pamela Gerrish Nunn and published in 1992, was a special lesbian issue of *Spiral*.³⁴ *The Power and the Glory: and other lesbian stories* was compiled, edited and self-published via Papers Inc. in 1987, by Miriam Saphira.³⁵ *The Lavender Annual*, also compiled, edited and

³⁰ *Broadsheet* began circulating in 1972. There were 214 issues produced over a period of twenty-five years. A summary of the contribution *Broadsheet* made to the feminist movement in New Zealand may be found in the 214th and final issue which was published by Womanfile Inc., Auckland, 1997.

³¹ "University of Auckland Gay Liberation Manifesto," *Broadsheet* 10 (1973): inside cover.

³² Pat Rosier, ed., *Been Around For Quite A While: Broadsheet* (Auckland: New Women's Press, 1992).

³³ *Spiral: Women's Arts Magazine*, published and distributed by Spiral Collective, was printed by Herstory Press, Wellington.

³⁴ *Spiral 7: A Collection of Lesbian Art and Writing from New Zealand*, eds. Heather McPherson, Julie King, Marian Evans, and Pamela Gerrish Nunn (Wellington: Spiral, 1992).

³⁵ *The Power and the Glory: and other lesbian stories*, ed. Miriam Saphira (Auckland: Papers Inc., 1987).

self-published via Papers Inc. in 1989, provided another avenue for the wider dissemination of New Zealand lesbian short fiction and poetry.³⁶ The *Lavender Annual* also served as a published source of lesbian literary news and commentary.³⁷

The Exploding Frangipani: Lesbian Writing from Australia and New Zealand, edited by Cathie Dunsford and Susan Hawthorne, was published by New Women's Press, 1990.³⁸ *Scratching The Surface* is a self-published collection of poetry and short stories produced and printed in 1993 by members of the Waikato Lesbian Writers' Group 'Scratching the Surface.'³⁹ *Car Maintenance, Explosives and Love: And Other Contemporary Lesbian Writings*, edited by Susan Hawthorne, Cathie Dunsford and Susan Sayer, was published in 1997 by the Melbourne-based feminist press, Spinifex.⁴⁰ New Zealand lesbian short fiction writers and poets have also

³⁶ *Lavender Annual*, comp. Miriam Saphira (Auckland: Papers Inc., 1989).

³⁷ Saphira's interest in the wider dissemination of lesbian literature also resulted in the production and distribution of her annotated bibliography "Lesbian Literature in the Auckland Public Library," Annotated Bibliography, 1984. Miriam Saphira's *Amazon Mothers* (Ponsonby: Papers Inc. 1984) was inspired by her prior bibliographic research into lesbian literature which showed that up until the second wave of feminism in the 1970s "novels with a lesbian theme showed little of lesbian mothers' relationships with their children" 6. Saphira points out, in *Amazon Mothers*, that in New Zealand "lesbian writers may have [had] articles published in the straight press ... *Spiral* and other feminist publications" 33. Saphira notes that New Zealand magazines like *Pink Triangle*, *Out* and *Circle* provided an avenue for cultural and social contacts, 32.

³⁸ *The Exploding Frangipani*, Dunsford and Hawthorne, was published with the assistance of the Literature Programme of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand (known since 1996 as Creative New Zealand). New Zealand lesbian writers were published in *Subversive Acts*, ed. Cathie Dunsford (Auckland: Penguin (NZ) Ltd., 1991) and *Me and Marilyn Monroe*, ed. Cathie Dunsford (Wellington: Daphne Brasell, 1993). *Me and Marilyn Monroe* was also published with the assistance of the Literature Programme of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council.

³⁹ *Scratching The Surface* (Hamilton: prod. and printed by members of Scratching The Surface, Waikato Lesbian Writers' Group, 1993), was produced with financial assistance from the Suffrage Grants Committee 1993.

⁴⁰ *Car Maintenance, Explosives and Love: and Other Contemporary Lesbian Writings*, eds. Susan Hawthorne, Cathie Dunsford, and Susan Sayer (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1997).

written for a series of anthologies published by both independent and mainstream publishers between 1986 and 1997.⁴¹

New Zealand lesbian fiction is also characterised by single-authored short story and poetry collections. Heather McPherson's poetry collections are: *A figurehead, a face*, Spiral, 1981, *The Third Myth*, Tauranga Moana Press, 1986, and *Other World Relations*, Old Bags, 1991.⁴² *Kanohi ki te Kanohi*, by Hinewirangi, is a collection of poems published by Moana Press in 1990.⁴³ *Mooncall* is a collection of poetry and short stories self-published by Marewa Glover in 1990.⁴⁴ New Women's Press published *The Daughter-In-Law and Other Stories*, by Frances

⁴¹ There are numerous New Zealand lesbian writers represented in a range of New Zealand short fiction and poetry anthologies. These anthologies include the *New Women's Fiction* series published by New Women's Press, 1986-1991. Maori lesbian writers have been published in four volumes of *Te Ao Marama: Contemporary Maori Writing*, ed., Witi Ihimaera, contrib. eds., Haare Williams, Irihapeti Ramsden and D. S. Long (Auckland: Reed, 1992-94). New Zealand lesbian short fiction writers and poets have also been published in *Private Gardens: An Anthology of New Zealand Women Poets*, ed. Riemke Ensing (Caveman, 1977), *In This Bitter Season* (Auckland: Womenspirit, 1983), *The Turning Face: Twelve Writers From Tauranga Moana*, ed. Robert de Roo (Tauranga: Tauranga Moana Press, 1984), *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, eds. Ian Wedde and Harvey McQueen (Auckland: Penguin, 1985), *The New Poets of the 80s*, eds. Murray Edmond and Mary Paul (Allen and Unwin, 1987), *Kiwi and Emu: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, ed. Barbara Petrie (Springwood, N.S.W.: Butterfly, 1989), *Yellow Pencils: Contemporary Poetry by New Zealand Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), *The Penguin Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry* (Auckland: Penguin, 1989), *Erotic Writing*, eds. Sue McCauley and Richard McLachlan (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1992), *Cherries on a Plate New Zealand Writers Talk About Their Sisters*, ed. Marilyn Duckworth (Auckland: Random House, 1996). The New Zealand feminist publication *WomanScript* (Lyttleton: WomanScript Publications Ltd.) was also an avenue for the publication of lesbian fiction and non-fiction for a period beginning in the late 1980s.

⁴² Heather McPherson, *A figurehead, a face* (Christchurch: Spiral, 1981), *The Third Myth* (Tauranga: The Tauranga Moana Press, 1986), *Other World Relations* (Wellington: Old Bags, 1991).

⁴³ Hinewirangi Kohu, *Kanohi ki te Kanohi* (Tauranga: Moana, 1990). For a comprehensive account of Hinewirangi's publications see Jon Battista, "Nga Ahorangi: A Bibliography of Maori Women's Creative Writing," *Hecate: A Women's Interdisciplinary Journal* 23.2 (1997): 162-63.

⁴⁴ Marewa Glover, *Mooncall* (Te Awamutu: P.O. Box 111, 1990). For a comprehensive account of Glover's publications see Battista 164.

Cherry, in 1986.⁴⁵ *Tahuri*, a collection of short stories by Ngahua Te Awekotuku, was published by New Women's Press in 1989.⁴⁶ *Finding Ruth*, published in 1987, is a collection of children's short stories by Renée.⁴⁷

A New Zealand lesbian fiction is also characterised by plays and novels intended for feminist, lesbian and mainstream readerships. New Zealand playwright and actor Lorae Parry has written *Frontwomen*, published by The Women's Play Press in 1993, *Cracks*, published by The Womens' Play Press in 1994, and *Eugenia*, published by Victoria University Press in 1996.⁴⁸ *Cracks* and *Eugenia* have both been performed internationally. Parry was awarded the position of Writer-In-Residence at Victoria University, Wellington, in 1998. Renée's published plays are *Setting The Table*,⁴⁹ *Secrets*,⁵⁰ *Wednesday To Come*,⁵¹ *Pass It On*,⁵² *Jeannie Once*,⁵³ "Form,"⁵⁴ and "Tiggy Tiggy Touchwood."⁵⁵

⁴⁵ Frances Cherry, *The Daughter-In-Law and Other Stories* (Auckland: New Women's Press, 1986).

⁴⁶ Ngahua Te Awekotuku, *Tahuri* (Auckland: New Women's Press, 1989). Te Awekotuku has been a significant presence in the gay and lesbian liberation movements in New Zealand since their beginnings. Glamuzina, "Historical Perspective" acknowledged Maori lesbians whose activism, she argued, opened the way for other activists. Amongst these activists is Te Awekotuku who was refused entry into the United States in 1972 because she was "a known sexual deviant." See Battista 185-86 for other published works of fiction and non-fiction by Ngahua Te Awekotuku. See, for example, Ngahua Te Awekotuku, "Dykes and Queers: Facts, Fairytales and Fictions (1980)," *Mana Wahine Maori: Selected Writings on Maori Women's Art, Culture and Politics* (Auckland: New Women's Press, 1991) 36-41.

⁴⁷ Renée, *Finding Ruth* (Auckland: Heinemann, 1987).

⁴⁸ Lorae Parry, *Cracks* (Wellington: The Women's Play Press, 1994), *Eugenia* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1996), *Frontwomen* (Wellington: The Women's Play Press, 1993).

⁴⁹ Renée, *Setting The Table* (Wellington: Playmarket, 1984).

⁵⁰ Renée, *Secrets* (Wellington: Playmarket, 1984).

⁵¹ Renée, *Wednesday To Come* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1985).

⁵² Renée, *Pass It On* (Wellington, Victoria University Press, 1986).

⁵³ Renée, *Jeannie Once* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1991).

Frances Cherry's first novel, *Dancing With Strings*, published by New Women's Press in 1989, was heralded by some as New Zealand's first lesbian novel. Her second novel, *The Widowhood of Jacki Bates*, was published by New Women's Press in 1991.⁵⁶ Annamarie Jagose's first novel, *In Translation*, was published by Victoria University Press in 1994.⁵⁷ Jagose was awarded The Louis Johnson New Writer's Bursary to write *In Translation* which won the Pen (New Zealand Society of Authors) Best First Book Award 1995. Jagose's second novel, *Lulu: A Romance*, was published by Victoria University Press in 1998.⁵⁸

At the time of writing Paula Boock's novels for young adults are: *Out Walked Mel*, McIndoe, 1991, *Sasscat To Win*, McIndoe, 1993, *Home Run*, Longacre, 1995 and *Dare, Truth or Promise*, Longacre, 1997.⁵⁹ Boock's fictions provide strong female role models for young women. *Dare, Truth or Promise*, which presented a love affair between two high school girls, won the Senior Fiction Prize and the overall prize for the Best Children's Book in the 1998 New Zealand Children's

⁵⁴ Renée, "Form," *Song Of The Shirt: Three One Act Plays*, (Dunedin: McIndoe, 1993) 44-69.

⁵⁵ Renée, "Tiggy Tiggy Touch Wood," *Playlunch* (University of Otago Press, 1996). "Tiggy Tiggy Touch Wood," was also published in *Intimate Acts: eight contemporary lesbian plays* (New York/Atlanta: Brito and Lair, 1997) 111-123. At the time of writing Renée's plays total seventeen. Extracts from Renée's published plays, novels and short stories have been variously anthologised. For bibliographic details of reviews of, and articles about, Renée's plays see Battista 179-80.

⁵⁶ Frances Cherry, *Dancing With Strings* (Auckland: New Women's Press, 1989), *The Widowhood of Jacki Bates* (Auckland: New Women's Press, 1991).

⁵⁷ Annamarie Jagose, *In Translation* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1994).

⁵⁸ Annamarie Jagose, *Lulu: A Romance* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1994).

⁵⁹ Paula Boock, *Out Walked Mel* (Dunedin: McIndoe, 1991), *Sasscat To Win* (Dunedin: McIndoe, 1993), *Home Run* (Dunedin: Longacre, 1995), *Dare, Truth or Promise* (Dunedin: Longacre: 1997). Children's book advocate, New Zealander Dorothy Butler, commented on national public radio that she would not allow her granddaughter to read this book.

Book Awards. Publicity surrounding the award included reports that many high schools have refused to hold *Dare, Truth or Promise* in their libraries.⁶⁰

Expatriate Canadian Sandi Hall wrote two novels during time spent in lesbian communities in New Zealand in the 1980s. She acknowledges the contribution made by New Zealand lesbians to political insights which informed her fictions.⁶¹

Hall gained publishing contracts outside New Zealand for two novels *The Godmothers*, The Women's Press, London, 1982, and *The Wingwomen of Hera*, Spinster/aunt lute, San Francisco, 1987.⁶² While living and writing in England, expatriate New Zealander Stella Duffy published *Calendar Girl*, via Serpent's Tail, London, 1994, and *Singling Out The Couples*, via Sceptre Books, London, in 1998.

Cathie Dunsford's first novel, *Cowrie*,⁶³ was co-published by Tandem Press (NZ) and Spinifex (Australia) in 1994. Its sequel, *The Journey Home/Te Haerenga Kainga*, was published by Spinifex, in 1997.⁶⁴ Both these novels have been

⁶⁰ It is also worth noting the publication of novels with lesbian content has not occurred without problems in New Zealand. Beryl Fletcher's first novel *The Word Burners* (Wellington: Daphne Brasell Associates, 1991) was first offered to a mainstream New Zealand publisher. The reason given for rejection was that the subject matter was considered inappropriate for a New Zealand novel. *The Word Burners* won the Commonwealth Writer's Regional Prize (South East Asia and Pacific) Best First Book 1992.

⁶¹ See inside cover Sandi Hall, *The Wingwomen of Hera* (San Francisco: Spinsters/aunt lute, 1987).

⁶² Sandi Hall, *The Godmothers* (London: The Women's Press, 1982).

⁶³ Cathie Dunsford, *Cowrie* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1994) and (Auckland: Tandem Press, 1994).

⁶⁴ Cathie Dunsford, *The Journey Home/ Te Haerenga Kainga* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1997). For a comprehensive account of Dunsford's publications see Battista 162-63.

distributed and reviewed internationally.⁶⁵ *Cowrie* and *The Journey Home* have been translated into German under the single title *Kia Kaha Cowrie*, published and distributed via Hamburg publishers, Rogner and Bernhard, in 1998.⁶⁶ Dunsford received a Project Grant from Creative New Zealand in 1997.

Jennifer Fulton is a New Zealand writer who has published four lesbian romance novels via the United States lesbian publishing house, Naiad.⁶⁷ These novels are: *Passion Bay*, 1993, *Saving Grace*, 1994, *True Love*, 1994, and *Greener Than Grass*, 1995.⁶⁸ Her work incorporates New Zealand characters and contexts. Fulton's choice of genre and publisher has earned her a wide readership and marked her as an international figure in lesbian romantic fiction circles.

I Have To Go Home is a teen novel by Renée.⁶⁹ Also by Renée, *Yin and Tonic* is a collection of comic writings.⁷⁰ Her other novels are: *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, *Does This Make Sense To You?*, and *The Snowball Waltz*. Renée has received a number of literary grants and awards.⁷¹ In 1989 she was the Robert

⁶⁵ See for example, Susan Sayer, "One of a Kind," rev. of *Cowrie*, by Cathie Dunsford, *Australian Women's Book Review* 6.4 (1994): 5, and Carolyn Gammon "The Journey Home: Te Haerenga Kainga," rev. of *The Journey Home: Te Haerenga Kainga*, by Cathie Dunsford, *Lesbian Review Of Books* 4.2 (1997-1998): 24-25.

⁶⁶ Cathie Dunsford. *Kia Kaha Cowrie* (Hamburg: Rogner and Bernhard, 1998).

⁶⁷ Jennifer Fulton has also published under the pseudonym Rose Beecham.

⁶⁸ Jennifer Fulton, *Passion Bay* (Tallahassee: Naiad, 1993), *Saving Grace* (Tallahassee: Naiad, 1994), *True Love* (Tallahassee: Naiad, 1994), *Greener Than Grass* (Tallahassee: Naiad, 1995).

⁶⁹ Renée, *I Have To Go Home* (Auckland: Puffin Books, 1997).

⁷⁰ Renée, *Yin and Tonic* (Auckland: Random House, 1998).

⁷¹ Renée received a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Grant in 1982, and the New Zealand Literary Fund Merit Award in 1986. She was awarded a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Travel Grant in 1988. In 1991 she received a Project Grant from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council. In 1993 she

Burns Fellow at the University of Otago, Dunedin. Renée was awarded the position of Writer-In-Residence at The University of Waikato, Hamilton, in 1994.

Despite a rapid growth in volume and variety, the existence of New Zealand lesbian literature is still not widely recognised.⁷² This is attributable, in part, to its reception, or lack thereof, by New Zealand critics and reviewers, including lesbian critics. McLeod, for example, indicates what she considers to be the meagre existence of “stories and poems in the ephemera of lesbian newsletters and a couple of lesbian anthologies (*Lavender Annual*, 1989 and *Spiral 7*, 1992) neither of which received critical attention.”⁷³ McLeod claims there is an “absence of published lesbian voices in the 1990s.”⁷⁴ Paradoxically, the “absent presence” of New Zealand lesbian writings remarked on by McLeod, is due to what she considers to be a scarcity of both lesbian writing *and* a lack of recognition for what has been written.

Within the context of this literary double-bind, individual works have been both patronised and marginalised. Reviewer Anne French, for example, finds *The Exploding Frangipani* “surprisingly literary.”⁷⁵ Jagose’s *In Translation* is noted for its “postmodernity and lack of autobiographical immediacy [to which] New

was awarded a Scholarship in Letters from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council and a Project Grant from Creative New Zealand in 1998.

⁷² See McLeod, “The Absent Presence.”

⁷³ McLeod, “The Absent Presence” 14.

⁷⁴ McLeod, “The Absent Presence” 14.

⁷⁵ Anne French, “The Exploding Frangipani,” rev. of *The Exploding Frangipani*, eds. Dunsford and Hawthorne, *Listener and TV Times* 1 Apr. 1991: 61.

Zealand women readers have found it difficult to relate.”⁷⁶ Reviewer Patricia Thwaites remarks that *Cowrie* “is punctuated with references to the fashionable ‘isms’—racism, colonialism, feminism, lesbianism and spiritualism.”⁷⁷ Thwaites finds, on the one hand, that *Cowrie* offers an “interesting insight into a subculture of our society.” On the other hand, she “imagine[s] *Cowrie*’s appeal to be limited to like-minded Maori lesbian feminist readers.”⁷⁸

Both the general oversight of, and the patronising attitude toward New Zealand lesbian fiction is attributable, in part, to there being little recognition that it is a constituent of both a wider lesbian literature and of a wider New Zealand literature. Its neglect is also attributable to the fact that there are no New Zealand academic or literary journals with a specific focus on lesbian (or gay) writing.⁷⁹ While the conference papers of the *New Zealand Women’s Studies Association* and the *New Zealand Women’s Studies Journal* have both been significant publishing outlets for New Zealand lesbian non-fiction since the mid-1980s, there has been no noticeable attention paid to lesbian fiction, New Zealand or otherwise.⁸⁰ *Lesbian Quarterly*—which superseded *Wellington Lesbian* (Network)

⁷⁶ McLeod, “The Absent Presence” 14.

⁷⁷ Patricia Thwaites, “Descriptively rich, but limited appeal,” rev. of *Cowrie*, by Cathie Dunsford, *Otago Daily Times* 5 Nov. 1994: 25.

⁷⁸ Thwaites 25.

⁷⁹ New Zealand literary journals which have published short fiction and non-fiction by New Zealand lesbian authors include *Landfall* and *Sport*.

⁸⁰ For New Zealand lesbian non-fiction discussions which have taken place in the context of New Zealand Women’s Studies conferences see, for example, Lynne Gifford, “The Lesbian as Folk Witch,” *Women’s Studies: Conference Papers 1980* (Auckland: Women’s Studies Association (N. Z.) Inc., P.O. Box 5067) 117-36, Moira, Pauline and Alison, “Lesbians Researching Lesbian Lives: A Workshop,” *Women’s Studies: Conference Papers 1983*, ed. Hilary Haines (Auckland: Women’s Studies Association (N. Z.) Inc., P.O. Box 5067) 231-32, and Christine Atmore, “‘But You’re Not Like That ...’ An Investigation of Some Aspects [of] The Family’s Reaction To The

Newsletter in the mid 1990s and currently operates as thirty-page magazine offering feature articles, interviews, reviews and creative work—holds some promise as an avenue for the critical reception of New Zealand lesbian literature.⁸¹

Within the context of a developing New Zealand lesbian studies there is considerable attention paid to formulating political strategies commensurate with a New Zealand context.⁸² At two New Zealand lesbian studies conferences there has been—as has happened elsewhere in Western academies—spirited debate over the relative merits of humanist and poststructuralist approaches to lesbian studies. In the context of New Zealand lesbian studies conferences, these debates took place in relation to the considered applicability, or otherwise, of theoretical frameworks for political and cultural analysis which have been formulated outside of postcolonial contexts.⁸³ For example, the problematics constituted by the relationship between sexuality and race in postcolonial contexts is taken to be an important consideration

Self-Proclaimed Lesbian, From The Lesbian's Perspective," *Women's Studies: Conference Papers 1986*, ed. Mary O'Hagan and Linda Cassells (Auckland: Women's Studies Association (N. Z.) Inc., P.O. Box 5067) 15-21.

⁸¹ *Lesbian Quarterly*, P.O. Box 11-882 Wellington.

⁸² The first Lesbian Studies Conference/Hononga Wahine Takatapui was held at the University of Victoria, Wellington, in October 1993. Harking back to early constraints on who could participate in New Zealand lesbian culture, this conference was advertised "For Lesbians Only." An emerging New Zealand lesbian studies is most often taught within the context of women's studies courses in New Zealand. For an account of lesbian studies in New Zealand see Susan Sayer, "Out of the Blue: Lesbian Studies in New Zealand," *The New Lesbian Studies: Into the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Bonnie Zimmerman and Toni A. H. McNaron (New York: The Feminist Press, 1996) 240-42.

⁸³ Judith Byrne and Mary Moon from the action group ION—Not In Our Name—addressed lesbian perspectives on Treaty issues, "Plenary Address," Lesbian Studies Conference/Hononga Wahine Takatapui, University of Victoria, Wellington, 19-21 May, 1995.

in New Zealand lesbian academic circles. It is my contention that these debates are applicable in relation to reading New Zealand lesbian literature.⁸⁴

In 1990, in response to two works of fiction by New Zealand lesbian writers, Jagose argued that both Renée and Te Awekotuku were already “writing from an emergent connection between New Zealand and lesbian literature.”⁸⁵ I take Jagose’s commentary to mean that she reads an emergent connection in these fictions to New Zealand literature, to New Zealand lesbian literature and to lesbian literature *per se*. Jagose assessed, for example, that “*Tahuri* [was] the first published text to pull together traditions of Maori and lesbian literature.”⁸⁶

Eight years later New Zealand lesbian literary commentator, McLeod, laments that *Tahuri* “which celebrates the lesbians within the Maori community, has become a forgotten book not recogn[ised] as an important new woman’s voice in New Zealand literature.”⁸⁷ McLeod and Jagose both link New Zealand literature with New Zealand lesbian literature. The fate suffered by *Tahuri* lends weight to my project of formulating a strategy for reading four novels by Renée. This endeavour is intended to inform New Zealand lesbian reviewers as well as an establishment New Zealand reviewing community.

⁸⁴ The second New Zealand Lesbian Studies Conference took place at Victoria University, Wellington, in May 1995. Active interest was shown in the production of New Zealand lesbian writing at a “Lesbians and Publishing” workshop held by Jennifer Fulton, Marian Evans and Tilly Lloyd at the second New Zealand Lesbian Studies Conference.

⁸⁵ Jagose, “Local accents” 112.

⁸⁶ Jagose, “Local accents” 112.

⁸⁷ McLeod, “The Absent Presence” 15.

As demonstrated in Chapter One, “Reading In A Lesbian Literary Field,” a lesbian literature *per se* has been subject to a critical practice formulated in relation to the political and cultural circumstances of its own production. As Glamuzina has pointed out, the wider history of lesbian writing has a common heritage. It is, therefore, plausible that a more recent lesbian literature produced in the postcolonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand may benefit from the insights derived from the theoretical and methodological practices developed over several decades for reading a wider lesbian literature. It is my thesis, however, that a lesbian literature and critical practice arising in the postcolonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand can offer an expanded vision on the politics as well as the theoretical and methodological grounds of lesbian literary practices *per se*.

In Chapter Four I explore some of the political, theoretical and methodological grounds of more general literary critical practices, as well as certain postcolonial literary critical practices which, I argue, are affecting the critical reception of a lesbian literature produced in the postcolonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand. In this chapter I also outline a poststructuralist strategy for reading lesbian texts written in signifying relationship to the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand; in this case four novels by Renée. It remains for other scholars to determine which other lesbian texts the theoretical and methodological strategy outlined in Chapter Four, and demonstrated in Part Two of this thesis, may be applicable to.

CHAPTER FOUR

READING RENÉE

In Chapter Three I focused attention on making visible a lesbian literature produced in the postcolonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand and in doing so I drew attention to some of the material conditions influencing its production. It is more directly in relation to some of the circumstances of its dissemination and critical reception that I have elected to address how four novels by Renée have been received into a literary culture which does not recognise a New Zealand lesbian literature as such. I have found that the New Zealand reviewing community has variously disparaged, ignored and trivialized the four novels by Renée published between 1990 and 1997.

In the present chapter I illustrate how the overall reception of these four novels has been characterised by antipathy. I argue that some of this antipathy is related to the possibility of reading a connection between a New Zealand literature and lesbian literature *per se*. In support of my argument I demonstrate how some hostile responses to these novels are characteristic of a colonialist discourse which manifests the traces of a colonialist literary aesthetic operating in contemporary New Zealand literary culture. I offer evidence that a colonialist literary aesthetic, embedded in the symbolic and cultural authority of the British Empire, manifests variously as classist, masculinist, anti-feminist and homophobic responses to four novels by Renée. Following my review of the critical reception of the four novels by the New Zealand reviewing community, I draw attention to the more general principles of colonialist discourse displayed in the operations of a humanist colonialist literary aesthetic within a contemporary New Zealand literary culture. I then outline the poststructuralist

theoretical and methodological strategy I have developed for reading the four novels.

From amongst the body of New Zealand lesbian literature identified in Chapter Three, I have elected to read four novels by Renée to demonstrate how these texts, written in signifying relationships to the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand, can be read productively beyond the scope of a colonialist literary aesthetic. The strategy I have developed for reading these four novels makes it possible for them to be conceptualised as part of New Zealand literature, New Zealand lesbian literature, postcolonial New Zealand literature and postcolonial New Zealand lesbian literature.

Each of these four novels is published by Penguin Books. Penguin is a New Zealand branch of an international press. Nevertheless, Renée's novels are not distributed outside of New Zealand. When the first of these, *Willy Nilly*, was published in 1990 Renée was faced with a New Zealand reviewing community ill-informed as to the existence of New Zealand lesbian literature, a situation which remains largely unchanged. Renée has had, therefore, to rely, with very few exceptions, on New Zealand reviews to achieve a post-publication presence for these novels.¹

¹ See Susan Sayer, "The Politics of Lesbian Existence in New Zealand," rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée, *Lesbian Review of Books* 2.1 (1995): 23, "Does This Make Sense To You?" rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, by Renée, *Australian Women's Book Review* 7.3/4 (1995): 21-22, "Does This Make Sense To You?" rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, by Renée, *Lesbian Review of Books* 2.3 (1996): 9, "Take Your Partners." rev. of *The Snowball Waltz*, by Renée, *Lesbian Review of Books* 4.3 (1998): 20-21.

Newspaper reviews constitute the bulk of what criticism does exist for them.² These reviews have been published, for the most part, in urban and provincial newspapers whose readerships cover the greater part of New Zealand. If for no other reason than the constraints of brevity usually imposed on newspaper reviewers in New Zealand, reviews of Renée's novels have, in general, fallen short of any kind of informed critique. Reviews commissioned by magazines and literary journals have not, in general, displayed any greater insights.

Mark Williams asserts that the "dominant mood of the [contemporary] literary culture sees New Zealand as a postcolonial society, desirably bi-cultural, with a responsibility to represent various voices."³ I have found this not to be the case amongst reviewers of Renée's novels. Kai Jensen traces a tradition of New Zealand writing about masculinity in New Zealand, a tradition characterised in its early stages by anti-feminist statements from New Zealand male writers which marked "the development of a literary culture in which women writers did not prosper."⁴ Traces of this New Zealand literary culture are to be found in reviews by both male and female reviewers of Renée's novels.

² Mark Williams, "Introduction," *Opening The Book: New Essays on New Zealand Writing* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995) points out that for a long time in New Zealand, newspaper reviewing constituted the bulk of what criticism there was, 9. Wystan Curnow observed in 1973 that "book reviewing has been almost the only kind of literary criticism practised in New Zealand" qtd. in Williams 25. That this is still the case is borne out in relation to reviews of Renée novels. Newspaper reviews constitute more than three-quarters of the reviews of Renée's novels, with student newspapers, queer community newspapers and New Zealand literary journals making up the remainder.

³ Williams 14.

⁴ Kai Jensen, *Whole Men: The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996) 10. Jensen suggests: "If we are looking for a clear-cut dramatic account of New Zealand masculinity, few sources are more satisfactory than literature" 13. For an historical perspective of local feminist novelists see Heather Roberts, *Where Did She Come From?: New Zealand Women Novelists 1862-1987* (Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1989). Roberts proceeds from a generally accepted feminist principle that "we cannot fully know the

Prior to 1990 and the publication of *Willy Nilly*, Renée already had an established reputation as a lesbian feminist cultural and literary activist.⁵ However, her public reputation was primarily as a playwright. Howard McNaughton, for example, refers to Renée as “[t]he playwright who led the move towards an uncompromisingly feminist theatre in New Zealand.”⁶ Williams argues that critics “*actively* participate in the making of literature and of culture generally.”⁷ Therefore, he argues, “new New Zealand criticism [requires] an awareness of the reading communities being addressed and constructed.”⁸ I have observed that a number of reviewers of Renée’s novels, actively engaged in addressing and constructing reading communities, conflate her reputation as a lesbian feminist literary activist with aspects of her personal history.⁹ This occurs most obviously in reviews which address and construct anti-feminist and/or anti-lesbian reading communities.

lives of women in New Zealand unless we have access to the fictional interpretation of those lives” 1.

⁵ Renée has been an administrator and member of the editorial collective of *Broadsheet*. Renée also wrote and produced the feminist stage revues “Asking For It,” and “What Did You Do In The War Mummy?” These revues toured widely throughout New Zealand in 1984 and 1985.

⁶ Howard McNaughton, “Drama,” *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature*, ed. Terry Sturm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 324. The entry for Renée in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature* falls under the title of “playwright” though her biographical entry includes *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, 696.

⁷ Williams 11.

⁸ Williams 25.

⁹ It is a matter of public information that Renée is of English/Irish and Ngati Kahungunu descent and that she was born in the Hawke’s Bay regional district of the North Island of New Zealand in 1929. Renée left school at aged twelve and worked in a woollen mill, a printing factory, and a grocery-dairy. She then studied extra-murally for a Bachelor of Arts Degree which she completed at The University of Auckland in 1979. This biographical information has appeared in various combinations across a range of sources over the last decade.

Reviewer Rebecca Simpson, for example, recalls Renée's "life-long preoccupations: poverty, working-class heroines butting up against the middle-classes the politics of feminism and lesbianism [in relation to which] Renée does not entirely escape a preaching tone."¹⁰ This comment reflects a less than favourable response to the politics of lesbian feminism, to the author and to her work. There is also a somewhat hostile and defensive tone to be found in reviews which focus on Renée's male characters. Gerry Webb reads "a women's story ... blunt and political [with] an obvious feminist bias [which] never moves far beyond stereotype."¹¹ David Hill similarly argues: "Males get a pretty poor press ... XY chromosome-holders are raw, ruttish, and/or irrelevant."¹² Ronda Cooper refers to Renée's "ruthless ... exposure of the Kiwi male."¹³

Renée's attention to the working-class has also caused offence amongst reviewers. Patricia Kay, for example, asserts that "Renée grew up in a poor family, which gave her a certain perspective on life and made her aware of social concerns. Her writing comes from her feminist view of the world, and sometimes takes a moral position."¹⁴ Kim Worthington argues, from her own moral position, that the New Zealand Renée portrays is,

¹⁰ Rebecca Simpson, "Charting life and death," rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée, *New Zealand Books* 3.2 (1993): 5.

¹¹ Gerry Webb, "Pregnant Tale," rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, by Renée, *Listener* 24 June 1995: 55.

¹² David Hill, "Love and Loss," rev. of *The Snowball Waltz*, by Renée, *New Zealand Herald* 25 Oct. 1997: G:6.

¹³ Ronda Cooper, "Significant subtleties," rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée, *Metro* 148 (1993): 155-156.

¹⁴ Patricia Kay, "Ageing 'hell for some of us'," rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée, *Evening Standard* 25 June 1994: 8.

a reservoir of wife-beating, child abuse, familial breakdown, puritanical social repression and hatred towards its marginal members, be they Maori, lesbian or women [which] feeds on and sustains negative stereotypes rather than challenges or subverts them.¹⁵

Renée's novels are part of a New Zealand lesbian literature as I demonstrate in this thesis. Reviewer Jane Stafford, however, finds that there "is little sense in which [*Willy Nilly*] could be classed as specifically lesbian writing."¹⁶ Reviewer Absalom remarks that it seems "a relatively short time since any mention of sexuality would have caused a surge of shock in New Zealand society. Certainly any hint of homosexuality or lesbianism would have resulted in outrage."¹⁷ Peter Payne is clear that this book "will not offend—simply because [it] will not be read by those threatened by the concept of lesbianism."¹⁸ Not only the lesbian characters themselves, but the overall sexual diversity of postcolonial communities represented in these four novels has also been treated by reviewers as distasteful and threatening. The review titles "Sexuality chaos,"¹⁹ and "A motley crew and a sordid spectacle,"²⁰ for

¹⁵ Kim Worthington, "The haunt of guilty memory," rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, by Renée, *New Zealand Books* 5.4 Oct. 1995: 6.

¹⁶ Jane Stafford, "Capacity to love binds characters," rev. of *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, by Renée, *Dominion Sunday Times* 13 May 1990: 19.

¹⁷ Irene Absalom, "Sexuality chaos," rev. of *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, by Renée, *Christchurch Star* 26 Aug. 1990: 21.

¹⁸ Peter Payne, "Romantic comedy tilts at prejudice," rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée, *Nelson Evening Mail* 4 Dec. 1993: 17.

¹⁹ Absalom 21.

²⁰ Belinda Kelly, "A motley crew and a sordid spectacle," rev. of *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, by Renée, *Marlborough Express* 28 May 1990: 13.

example, suggest a moral upheaval in the New Zealand culture Renée represents.

I have also noted a general discomfort amongst reviewers about the size of, as well as the diversity of postcolonial communities represented in Renée's novels. Belinda Kelly, for example, argues that in *Willy Nilly* "there are almost too many characters interacting, as they often become difficult to keep track of."²¹ Susan Ash comments on "a proliferation of characters in *Willy Nilly*."²² Gavin McLean refers to "an overabundance of superfluous bit players" in *Daisy and Lily*.²³ Heather Murray admits her own confusion over "too many peripheral characters [as Murray argues] Renée tries to squeeze in some 70 poorly-differentiated 'extras' who come and go with a bewildering array of names," in *Daisy and Lily*.²⁴ Nicola Chapman finds the number of "characters and pivotal relationships [therefore] undeveloped" in *Does This Make Sense To You?*²⁵ Anne Else felt "an enormous cast [was] just a bit crowded" in *The Snowball Waltz*.²⁶

²¹ Kelly 13.

²² Susan Ash, "Mismatch of farce and drama at an oddball wedding," rev. of *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, by Renée, *Evening Post* 19 May 1990: 28.

²³ Gavin McLean, "Tales of women contrast sharply," rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée, *Otago Daily Times* 23 Oct. 1993: 22.

²⁴ Heather Murray, "A View of the Battle," rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée, *Quote/Unquote* 4 (1993): 35.

²⁵ Nicola Chapman, "Closed adoption's silent sufferers," rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, by Renée, *Evening Post* 28 Apr. 1995: 5.

²⁶ Anne Else, rev. of *The Snowball Waltz* by Renée, interview with Kim Hill, National Radio, Wellington, 24 Oct. 1997.

There is a cluster of more congenial reviews which stand as a seeming antidote to the specific and general antipathy found in other reviews of Renée's novels. Paula Cunninghame refers to Renée as "that nice, middle-aged lady smiling out at us from her picture on the back cover."²⁷ Reviewer MM glowingly attests that Renée writes "roundly, wryly and warmly of the myriad pockets of experience that shape us all."²⁸ Else asserts that the men in Renée's books are "very credible men ... nice men, ordinary men."²⁹ Stephen Donald gives the following reassurance: "Renée approaches the whole business with much humour, taking the mickey out of both 'polite' society and various 'alternative' communities."³⁰ These facile and patronising comments contribute little to an understanding of the relationship to a New Zealand literature and/or to a New Zealand lesbian literature in these novels.

It is my contention that it is implicit in a range of reviews that Renée's depictions of New Zealanders on the so-called sexual margins of New Zealand culture is an unrepresentative and unreliable perspective on that culture as a whole. I suggest, therefore, that reviewers who connotatively imply that Renée's novels are neither reliable nor truthful representations of New Zealanders, or of New Zealand culture, are speaking from within a Western humanist discourse

²⁷ Paula Cunninghame, "Diverse guises blend into interesting novel," rev. of *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, by Renée, *New Zealand Herald* 26 May 1990: 6.

²⁸ MM, "Love between women defying convention," rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée, *Rotorua Daily Post* 15 Sept. 1993: 18.

²⁹ Else, Interview.

³⁰ Stephen Donald, "Two novels deal with sexual abuse differently," rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée, *Hawkes Bay Herald Tribune* 2 Oct. 1993: 15.

where a metonymic signifying chain links (at least) reliability and representativeness with truth. In a Western humanist system of representation where “the truth corresponds in an unmediated way to real objects and values,”³¹ the truth is what *anyone could know*. In this way, reviewers speaking from within a Western humanist system of representation are arguing for the possibility of an unbiased aesthetic judgement; one which purports to transcend the politics and place of its production. This system of representation, which purports to offer a universal and unbiased literary criticism, was formative of a Western literary canon which held sway until the second wave of feminism in the 1960s when feminist literary critics argued that this criticism was reflective of white Western literary masculinism.³²

Renée’s contribution to a New Zealand literature *per se* has been vilified by hostile reviewers of her novels. These reviewers actively participate in the making of literature and culture, and in the construction of reading communities. To be excluded from a New Zealand literary canon, being that “body of texts perceived to have certain aesthetic qualities,”³³ on grounds of unreliability and unrepresentativeness is an effect of a Western humanist aesthetics operating on a contemporary New Zealand literary culture. Connotations of unreliability and unrepresentativeness are “ideological events” which, in this, context signify in relation to a humanist colonialist discourse

³¹ Silverman 128.

³² See Chapter One which traces in footnotes the development of a feminist literary criticism in relation to the development of a lesbian literary criticism.

³³ Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) 6.

invested in the symbolic and cultural authority of the British Empire. It is my contention that these reviewers invested in a colonialist discourse address similarly invested readers and, thereby, actively participate in the making of a colonialist literary culture, including the construction of (at least) anti-lesbian, anti-feminist, masculinist, middle-class, white colonialist reading communities.

A prevailing colonialist literary aesthetic operating in New Zealand literary culture is alluded to in an open letter to *Landfall* by expatriate New Zealander Fay Weldon. Weldon refers to a general tendency she observes amongst New Zealand writers not to identify the place from which they write:

Events and conversations tend to take place in a vacuum, as if it were somehow un-literary to describe the age, race, status or appearance of the protagonist; let alone where they are—up a mountain, down a mine, in a shopping mall. But if the reader is given no clue, that reader assumes a middleness—a middle age, race, status, appearance—and in that middleness lies boredom, flatness. If you don't describe a place, the reader assumes a front parlour.³⁴

The so-called “vacuum” in which events and conversations are said to take place in New Zealand literature can be read productively through Weldon's own chosen metaphor of the front parlour. In the context of Weldon's letter, the front parlour can be read as a culturally-coded fragment of ideology that “inverts it

³⁴ Fay Weldon, “An open letter to the Editors of *Landfall*,” *Landfall* 174 (1990): 233.

class origin ... into a natural reference.”³⁵ Reread this way, in the absence of a specified fictional location, the front parlour connotatively signifies a “natural reference” to a British middle-class. The front parlour also signifies in a metonymic relationship to the British Empire as domestic parlance (read: colonialist discourse) which discursively represents the symbolic and cultural order of the mother country.

The front parlour also signifies in a metaphoric relationship to a national *façon de parler*, discursively represented by *the House of Parliament*. In this way, the front parlour signifies in metaphoric relationship to a national literature. Therefore, where the front parlour, the House of Parliament, and the British Empire stand in metaphoric and metonymic relationship to each other, the front parlour signifies the discursive presence of the Western humanist subject who assumes “a middle age, race, status, appearance” in New Zealand literature. David Lloyd argues that because it occupies a position of exchangeability with anyone, anywhere, the Western humanist subject approximates “the global ubiquity of the white European.”³⁶ For Lloyd, this is “the racist Subject-who-judges.”³⁷

My reading of Weldon’s letter lends support to my argument that the traces of a colonialist literary aesthetic are influencing a contemporary literary culture in

³⁵ Barthes, *S/Z* 97-98.

³⁶ Lloyd 70.

³⁷ Lloyd 77.

New Zealand.³⁸ To not identify the place from where one writes can also be read as a writing strategy aimed at achieving literary credibility in the metropolis.³⁹ These kinds of imperialist effects, which are sometimes referred to as the colonial cringe, concealing the diversities among and within the colonies,⁴⁰ can be also read as features of an imperialist cultural force operating in a postcolonial sphere. This manifests as a dependency on the imperialist culture which extends to a valorisation of the literature of the mother country, and a corresponding disregard for literature which does not signify in accordance with the symbolic and cultural order of the British Empire.

Notwithstanding the evidence I have presented regarding the continuing presence of a colonialist literary culture, a New Zealand literary culture has to some extent accommodated and been influenced by a generalised contemporary postcolonial literary culture characterised by debates about the relative merits of humanist and poststructuralist approaches to representation; debates which are paralleled in a generalised lesbian humanist literary field. A humanist approach to literary representation in a postcolonial context is characterised, for example,

³⁸ Weldon 233.

³⁹ See, for example, Brydon and Tiffin, "Introduction," *Decolonising Fictions* 13. Writers seeking metropolitan-identified readers may also avoid locating their fictional protagonists for other reasons. For example, for a writer to choose not to specify a national location is a credible writing strategy for articulating the dislocation experienced by those who are denied sexual citizenship. Miles Lanham, "Review of *Peculiar Chris*," by Johann S. Lee, *Skoob Pacifica: postcolonial writings of the pacific rim 2* (1994) suggests that the reader of this postcolonial gay novel "might expect Lee to describe contemporary Singapore in more detail. Lee's spartan style omits this, which has the effect of giving the persecution of gay men in the novel no concrete context. The events could quite easily have taken place in Britain before the Wolfenden Act of 1967" 159. Lanham is suggesting that Lee articulates the transnational nature of gay persecution in an artful avoidance of national location.

⁴⁰ Crane refers to a shared anglocentricism and/or eurocentricism among nations who had colonial heritages in common, as a "colonial myopia" 23.

by questions such as: “What is a postcolonial author?” and “What is postcolonial writing?” Where the said possibility of lesbian authority and lesbian identity (read: authenticity) in the creation of a discrete (read: humanist) and definitive lesbian literature has lead to the prescription that *only a lesbian writer can do it*, and the same said possibility of authenticity in the creation of a discrete (read: humanist) and definitive black lesbian literature has lead to the prescription that *only a black lesbian writer can do it*, in a postcolonial humanist literary field this has lead to the prescription that *only an authentic postcolonial writer can do it*.

A Western humanist impulse towards the creation of so-called authentic representations in a postcolonial literary field occurs, Frantz Fanon argues, because colonial domination is “total and tends to over-simplify, [and] very soon manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people.”⁴¹ For this reason authors and critics engage in a “passionate search for a national culture which existed before the colonial era.”⁴² Boehmer argues that this occurs under colonial domination as “colonized peoples seek to take their place, forcibly or otherwise, as historical subjects.”⁴³ Brydon similarly argues that the concept of authenticity has been used “by colonial peoples in their struggles to regain power over their own lives.”⁴⁴ She observes, however, that

⁴¹ Frantz Fanon, “On National Culture,” Williams and Chrisman 45.

⁴² Fanon 37.

⁴³ Boehmer 3.

⁴⁴ Diana Brydon, “The White Inuit Speaks: Contamination as Literary Strategy,” Adam and Tiffin 195. Brydon, “The White Inuit Speaks” refers to a “cult of authenticity” operating in contemporary postcolonial literary field, 195.

the concept of “contamination” comes not so much from indigenous writers and critics as it does from “a first world criticism respectful of a third world authenticity that [the first] world is believed [to have] lost.”⁴⁵

Western humanist reading and writing strategies, deployed in the interests of a said possible postcolonial authenticity, are operating in a contemporary literary culture in New Zealand. This has occurred, for example, in critical responses to Keri Hulme’s Booker Prize-winning novel *the bone people*. In an attack on what he reads as the “political correctness” of early enthusiasts of *the bone people*, Alan Duff argues that the Booker Prize is generally awarded to “[a]ny one who is ethnically a bit exotic for that year.”⁴⁶ Duff suggests that Hulme’s prize-winning credentials lie in what he considers to be her dubious status as a “Maori and a woman to boot.”⁴⁷ Duff discredits Hulme’s indigenous authority and therefore, her ability to authentically represent Maori on the grounds that she is “substantially more European,” than Maori.⁴⁸

C. K. Stead takes a similarly discrediting view of Hulme and of *the bone people*.⁴⁹ Stead’s assessment is that *the bone people* “is not in any obvious way

⁴⁵ Brydon 195. Brydon refers to Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: OUP, 1988) who, Brydon points out, “argues that Canada’s native peoples are the authentic post-colonial voice of the nation and with its implication that descendants of settlers and immigrants represent at best a contaminated post-coloniality” 195.

⁴⁶ Alan Duff, “Land of the No-backbone People,” *Waikato Times* 3 Mar. 1998: 6.

⁴⁷ Duff, “No-backbone People” 6.

⁴⁸ Duff, “No-backbone People” 6.

⁴⁹ C. K. Stead, *Answering to the Language: Essays on Modern Writers* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989).

a 'feminist' novel."⁵⁰ He also finds that "some essential Maori elements in her novel are unconvincing, not inevitable, not entirely authentic."⁵¹ For Stead, *the bone people* and its author are not unequivocally what he suggests their publicists and admirers claim them to be; that is, sufficiently feminist and authoritatively Maori. In Stead's assessment, the book's said failure rests on Hulme's inability to register an authenticity expected of both an indigenous writer and a feminist writer. Michael Goldsmith comments that when he was reading Stead's critique of *the bone people*,

the inescapable image [came] to mind of an English officer in the colonial militia, circa 1870, trying desperately to instill some discipline in the troops, only to discover that they are ignoring his orders, strolling off the parade ground, and enrolling in other causes.⁵²

Goldsmith notes that Stead's attention to the said deficiencies of the book are a part of "a colonial discourse."⁵³ Goldsmith suggests that a "book's importance is in part a reflection of its recruitment to social ends."⁵⁴ He argues, therefore,

⁵⁰ C. K. Stead qtd. in Michael Goldsmith, "Reviewing the Colonial Tropes," rev. of *Answering to the Language: Essays on Modern Writers*, by C. K. Stead. *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin* 4.2 (1992): 16.

⁵¹ C. K. Stead qtd. in Goldsmith 17.

⁵² Goldsmith 18.

⁵³ Goldsmith 18.

⁵⁴ Goldsmith 17.

that *the bone people*” must be judged in part as a cultural artefact in the anthropological sense—and so must its reception by the critical establishment.”⁵⁵

I have argued that “an imaginative command,”⁵⁶ instilled by an earlier British textual imperialism and influencing a contemporary New Zealand literary culture, manifests as multiple processes and effects of assimilation and exclusion in the production, dissemination, critical reception, and recuperation of literatures emerging in postcolonial contexts.⁵⁷ It has also been my contention that what has been read by reviewers as an unrepresentative and overlarge group of characters drawn from the social and sexual margins of New Zealand culture in four novels by Renée, may be *precisely* those characters who have previously occupied “the dumb center in historical narratives of gender and sexuality” in a colonialist New Zealand literary culture.⁵⁸ Therefore, I ask: “How might these four novels be otherwise read?”

In Chapter Two it will be recalled, I adapted a Barthesian strategy for rereading three colonialist texts. These colonialist texts, like the paradigmatic classic text, stressed the values of “unity, realism and transparency.”⁵⁹ My rereading of these three colonialist texts demonstrated the Barthesian principle that despite

⁵⁵ Goldsmith 17.

⁵⁶ Boehmer 5.

⁵⁷ Janice Gould refers to the occurrence of “cultural violence as many [native American] tribes experienced ... assimilation, and acculturation through the erosion and evasion of treaty obligations” 34.

⁵⁸ Dhairyam 35.

⁵⁹ Silverman 242.

all efforts to control the play of signification, the text always exceeds the classic model. This manifests as a “limited plural.” Alongside, and in direct contrast with the classic textual model, Barthes introduces what he calls the writerly text.

Renée’s novels are not examples of “classic expressive realism [where the] intention is fidelity to the dynamics of individual lesbian lives and the collective lesbian community.”⁶⁰ It is my contention that each of four novels by Renée is characterised by signifying operations which are illustrative of the Barthesian model of the writerly text. Far from striving for transparency as does the classic text, the writerly text “attempts to foreground the traces of cultural [and symbolic] inscription.”⁶¹ Silverman observes:

The writerly text comes into existence as an archaeological dig at the site of the classic text. It exhumes the cultural voices, or codes, responsible for that latter’s enunciation, and in the process it discovers multiplicity instead of consistency, and signifying flux instead of stable meaning.⁶²

It is my contention that the writerly text of each of the four novels comes into existence as an archaeological dig at the site of the colonialist text, via which

⁶⁰ Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 24.

⁶¹ Silverman 246.

⁶² Silverman 246.

the discursive constitution of a range of subjectivities, including sexual subjectivities, can be reread. In contrast with the classic text, the writerly text opts for ideological inconsistency by activating a greater number and diversity of codes, or levels of signification, than does the classic text. In the writerly text numerous codes signify simultaneously, without regard to the rules of precedence of sequentiality.”⁶³ The writerly goal is, therefore, to support “all of the signifying possibilities, no matter how manifold and contradictory.”⁶⁴ These are amongst a number of strategies deployed by Renée in her writerly rereading of the colonialist texts of family, empire, home and nation in the four novels.

Helen Tiffin argues that very often it is not something intrinsic to a work of fiction, but rather the context of discussion in which it is placed that marks it as postcolonial or otherwise.⁶⁵ It is my thesis that the four novels by Renée can be read as lesbian texts informed by colonialist discourses. I have placed these

⁶³ Silverman 246.

⁶⁴ Silverman 257.

⁶⁵ Helen Tiffin, “Introduction,” argues that “specific tropes” may take on very different meanings and vectors depending on the cultural context of their production and the ways in which they are understood by particular audiences” x. Linda Hutcheon, “The post always rings twice: the postmodern and the postcolonial,” *Textual Practice* 8.2 (1994) addresses these problems of representation in responses to an exhibition entitled “Into The Heart of Africa” at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, 1989. Hutcheon points out that the stated intention of the museum curator was to present an exhibition of objects acquired during early European colonisation in Africa by missionaries and soldiers and subsequently brought to Canada. The curator intended to focus a reading of the exhibition on the colonialist attitudes inherent in the collection of these items. She tried to direct this focus by giving written texts to objects which presented the imperialist ideology and the colonialist discourses of the Canadian soldiers and missionaries who had collected these objects. It was never intended to be a representation of the objects from the point of view of either the indigenous creators, or the indigenous subjects of these objects. Readings of, and reactions to “Into The Heart of Africa” were passionate and varied. Even though the curator intended the exhibition to suggest a re-appraisal of colonialist attitudes and practices, problems arose when her own political stance was read as, at least, ambivalent. The exhibition was picketed and the curator subsequently resigned amidst accusations of racism by museum patrons, 205-38.

novels in contexts of discussion which consider the possibility for reading them as part of (at least) New Zealand literature, New Zealand lesbian literature, postcolonial New Zealand literature, and postcolonial (New Zealand) lesbian literature.

Wolfe and Penelope consider it “necessary to review the position that Lesbians have occupied within patriarchy and its discourses.”⁶⁶ They also argue that lesbians “cannot allow [a] concern with the politics of sexuality under patriarchy to become absorbed in the study of mere textuality.”⁶⁷ It is my contention that the development of a poststructuralist postcolonial (in this case read: queer) strategy for reading four novels by Renée is not a depoliticisation of lesbian cultural and political objectives. In my queer reading of the four novels I undertake to review some of the subject positions lesbians have occupied in colonialist (read: patriarchal) discourses. In my queer reading I disrupt a Western humanist system of representation by bringing the term lesbian into a textual relationship with the categories of (at least) sex, gender, sexuality, race and class in colonialist discourses. This rereading of the discursive constitution of colonialist subjectivities under British Imperialism is not an absorption in the study of “mere textuality.” It is a study of the textual and, hence, material effects of colonisation, in particular the effects of the constitution of sexualized subjectivities and of effects of the constitution of a colonialist literary aesthetic.

⁶⁶ Wolfe and Penelope argue that poststructuralism is “but a new variant” of patriarchal discourse, 5.

⁶⁷ Wolfe and Penelope 5.

In my lead up to reading the four novels I have taken an imperial route via a rereading of colonialist discourses which privilege subjectivities that most closely approximate a subjectivity sexed-gendered-sexualised-classed-raced (variously) male-masculine-hetero-bourgeoisie-white. This discursive privileging would seem to locate the lesbian subject within a symbolic and cultural order where she sees herself “within the mirror of the reigning ideology.”⁶⁸ Silverman, however, points out that the Barthesian textual strategy provides another possibility:

S/Z suggests that we can escape from the symbolic field which we presently inhabit by first mastering its codes, and then recombining them to form a new one—by moving from a passive to an active discursive position, from repetition to innovation.⁶⁹

She proposes that Barthes’s reading strategy “offers the possibility of a radical reconstruction.”⁷⁰ It is my contention that both the writerly text of the four novels by Renée, and my queer reading of these writerly texts, manifest such radical reconstruction, or reconstitution, of colonialist discourses.

Barthes argues that the values of the classic text reduce the reader “to an involuntary rehearsal of what has already been culturally written.”⁷¹ He

⁶⁸ Silverman 141.

⁶⁹ Silverman 249.

⁷⁰ Silverman 249.

⁷¹ Silverman 242.

suggests, however, that: “The goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.”⁷² The writerly text, thus, engages the reader “in a productive rather than a consumptive capacity.”⁷³ Silverman points out that a Barthesian notion of textual process also suggests both writers and readers participating in “an ongoing manufacture of meaning.”⁷⁴ In this spirit I enter into a co-productive relationship with the writerly texts of four novels by Renée. Barthes argues that “to rewrite the writerly text could consist only in disseminating it, in dispersing it within the field of infinite difference.”⁷⁵ My reading of the four novels is one such possible act of dissemination.

I contend that, having read an unrepresentative and “motley crew” in the four novels, the New Zealand reviewing community has failed to recognise the muted “countless multitudes” and others, as (potentially writerly) constituents of a postcolonial New Zealand (lesbian) literature. My queer reading of the writerly text of each the four novels reveals how Renée has, in effect, “stroll[ed] off the parade ground” of a colonialist literary aesthetic.⁷⁶

Over the next four chapters my readings demonstrate connections in each of the four novels to New Zealand literature, postcolonial New Zealand literature,

⁷² Barthes, *S/Z* 4.

⁷³ Silverman 246

⁷⁴ Silverman 247.

⁷⁵ Barthes, *S/Z* 5.

⁷⁶ Goldsmith 18.

New Zealand lesbian literature and postcolonial (New Zealand) lesbian literature. My reading strategy manifests a variety of instances in each of the four novels, of the text of lesbian subjectivity, or, the postcolonial lesbian text.

PART TWO:

READINGS OF FOUR NOVELS BY RENÉE

CHAPTER FIVE

THE COLONIALIST TEXT OF FAMILY IN *WILLY NILLY*

Willy Nilly is set in urban Auckland in the early 1980s and opens in the home of Sonja March, Polly March and Evvie Nisbet. Evvie is Sonja's lover of one year. Polly is Sonja's twenty-year old daughter who was conceived via artificial insemination in the late 1960s. Polly has just announced to Sonja and Evvie that she intends to marry Luke Grant and that the wedding will take place on the back lawn. This sets the scene for Renée's writerly articulation of the colonialist text of family in *Willy Nilly*. In this process the text of lesbian subjectivity in the postcolonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand is also made manifest.

Willy Nilly is an exemplary illustration of the writerly textual model where "everything signifies ceaselessly and several times, but without being delegated to a great final ensemble, to an ultimate structure."¹ It is characterised not by a structure of signifieds, but rather by a "galaxy of signifiers."² Whereas in the classic text the number of oppositions that can come into play at any one time is rigorously limited, the plurality of meaning in the writerly text comes from the subversion of binary oppositions such that "the symbolic code functions atypically, in violation rather than in support of the larger social matrix."³

¹ Barthes, *S/Z* 12.

² Barthes, *S/Z* 5.

³ Silverman 273.

In this chapter I demonstrate how the symbolic order of the British Empire is subverted in *Willy Nilly* via a writerly deployment of the narrative structure of “the closet.”⁴ Sedgwick argues that there can be few gay people in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence.⁵ She also points out that “even to come out does not end anyone’s relation to the closet, including turbulently the closet of the other.”⁶ This occurs because the normative category of “the homosexual” is indispensable “to those who define themselves as against it.”⁷

In *Willy Nilly* the closet is not simply a feature of the lives of the lesbian characters. Where the image of coming out “regularly interfaces the image of the closet,” this narrative structure is also a feature of the lives of characters variously sexed-gendered-sexualised-classed-raced in colonialist discourses.⁸ Jean Adeane’s review title, “Raising the shutters on suburbia,”⁹ suggests a generalised

⁴ Sedgwick, “Epistemology” 45. The narrative structure of the closet is articulated by Eve Sedgwick as the “open” or “telling secret,” a figuration historically located in Lord Alfred Douglas’s “epochal public utterance, in 1894, ‘I am the love that dare not speak its name’” 49.

⁵ Sedgwick, “Epistemology” 46. Sedgwick argues that the resilience and productivity of the narrative structure of the closet is located in epistemologically charged pairings which include knowledge/ignorance, secrecy/disclosure, innocence/initiation, masculine/feminine, majority/minority, same/different, natural/artificial, new/old, growth/decadence, urban/provincial, health/illness, cognition/paranoia, art/kitsch, sincerity/sentimentality, and voluntary/addiction. Sedgwick proposes that any of these epistemologically charged pairings can be condensed in the figures of “the closet” and “coming out” 48-49. She argues that the suffusing stain of homo/heterosexual crisis has been so permeative that to discuss any of these indices in any context, in the absence of an antihomophobic analysis, must perhaps be to perpetuate unknowingly compulsions implicit in each, 48-49. Sedgwick notes that the closet is a narrative structure which can, and has been, adopted by other oppressed groups, but which has not been “evacuated of its historical gay specificity” 48.

⁶ Sedgwick, “Epistemology” 54.

⁷ Sedgwick, “Epistemology” 55.

⁸ Sedgwick, “Epistemology” 48.

⁹ Jean Adeane, “Raising the shutters on suburbia,” rev. of *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, by Renée, *Dominion* 5 May 1990: 7. See also Eve Ebbett, “Renée laughs at life,” rev. of *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, by Renée, *Hawkes Bay Herald Tribune* 7 Aug. 1990, who notices that a “wedding in the family exposes the skeletons in the closet” 15.

exposure of various closets in the colonialist nation New Zealand. This is done, partly, via writerly disruptions of classic operations of the semic and the hermeneutic codes in *Willy Nilly*.

Within the context of colonialist cultural production, the metaphor of the front parlour connotatively signifies a colonialist literary aesthetic. In this chapter I demonstrate how, in *Willy Nilly*, the front parlour can be read as a signifier of respectability in the hetero-colonialist home. *Willy Nilly* is also characterised by a writerly play of signification in relation to a “legitimating eros,” being the eros which signifies in accordance with the symbolic and cultural orders of the colonialist nation New Zealand.¹⁰ In these manifold ways *Willy Nilly* “strives for anarchy and incoherence.”¹¹

My reading is also mindful of the literary climate into which *Willy Nilly* was received in 1990. Charles Croot speculated on the potential reception of this, Renée’s first novel:

There’s always a bit of a stir among the literati when an established writer moves into a new medium. Will the skills shown in one genre transfer successfully to another? Will the themes and preoccupations of the earlier

¹⁰ The phrase “legitimating eros” occurs in David Halperin, “The Democratic Body: Prostitution and Citizenship in Classical Athens,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist and Cultural Studies* 2.1 (1990): 10.

¹¹ Silverman 246.

work reappear in the new format? Is “X” going to reveal feet of clay and fall flat on his (sic) face?¹²

Croot’s own assessment is that *Willy Nilly* “does represent a major change of theme, attitude and style as well as of genre,”¹³ though he finds: “Just what genus the book does belong to is less easy to define.”¹⁴ He was correct in his prediction that the so-called literati would be stirred up, as a number of reviewers did endeavour to make Renée fall flat on her face. In light of Renée’s prior literary reputation as a playwright, *Willy Nilly* was assessed by one reviewer as “a ‘stagey’ novel.”¹⁵ For another reviewer there was considered to be “little sense in which it could be classed as specifically lesbian writing.”¹⁶ Elsewhere, it was considered that it “may be wise to tag this novel for senior students as some of the issues raised may be seen as social engineering and presenting values not universally accepted.”¹⁷

¹² Charles Croot, “Renee rockets along with a well-populated novel,” rev. of *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, by Renée, *Otago Daily Times* 5 May 1990: 21.

¹³ Croot 21.

¹⁴ Croot 21.

¹⁵ Susan Ash, “Mismatch of farce and drama at an oddball wedding,” rev. of *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, by Renée, *The Evening Post* 19 May 1990: 28.

¹⁶ Stafford 19.

¹⁷ Betty Patterson, “Fiction,” rev. of *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, by Renée, *New and Notable: Books for Secondary Schools* 7.5 (1990): 7. Claire Gummer, “Renée refuses to be pushed to the edge,” rev. article on Renée, *Man to Man* 11 May 1995, reports that *Willy Nilly* “with its revelations that one character’s ‘father’ was the proverbial meat baster (used in sperm donation), is the most stolen book from one school library” 1-2.

While there was disagreement and confusion amongst reviewers as to its genus and/or literary merits,¹⁸ Renée had a genre clearly in mind for *Willy Nilly*. She remarked during a guest lecture at the University of Waikato in 1996, that she had felt in the late 1980s it was time New Zealand had a lesbian novel.¹⁹ In so saying, Renée evokes “an emergent connection between New Zealand and lesbian literature.”²⁰ I pursue this connection as part of my reading of *Willy Nilly* where I find the hetero-normative family structure queered in the writerly text, not simply via the family headed by the lesbian mother, Sonja March, but via each of the three principal families; the March family, the Grant family and the Scott whanau/family.

Kath Weston points out that in the 1980s a discourse on gay families emerged as “a reconfiguration of the terrain of kinship.”²¹ Where family members belong to wider neighbourhood and economic communities, communities of political affiliates, lesbian communities, and to Pakeha and Maori whanau/family, hapu, iwi, and marae-based support networks, *Willy Nilly* is part of that reconfiguration of the terrain of kinship. In this writerly reconstitution of the colonialist text of family, the symbolic code of the colonialist nation is made to function atypically.

¹⁸ Cunninghame, “Diverse guises blend into interesting novel,” for example, points out that *Willy Nilly* can be read as a “slap-dash farce, a satirical comedy, a commentary on contemporary mores or a statement of lesbian perspectives” 6.

¹⁹ Renée, guest lecture, University of Waikato, Hamilton, 24 Sept. 1996.

²⁰ Jagose, “Local Accents” 112.

²¹ Kath Weston, *Families We Choose* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) 2. Weston argues that gay families “emerged as part of a wider process [in] the overt politicization of kinship” 1. She treats “family [as] not so much an institution, but as a contested concept, implicated in the relations of power that permeated societies” 3. See also Anonymous Queers, “I Hate Straights,” *San Diego Gay Times* 9 August 1990, who declared: “in the politics of power the main dividing line [is] that magic word—family” 3.

Together, these three principal families signify the postcolonial nation, Aotearoa New Zealand, queered in the writerly text, *Willy Nilly*.

In Chapter Three I drew attention to the problem, perceived by reviewers of Renée's novels, of the number and diversity of characters she portrays. Ebbett argues that in *Willy Nilly* two of Renée's characters "are lesbians living in a relationship, and the rest of the cast, men and women, are an unusual hodge-podge of unlikely people."²² Ash comments that a "subplot about Sonja's neighbours leads to a proliferation of characters," and wondered whether "a Kiwi-produced 'sitcom' might not provide a more successful medium for Renée's ideas."²³ Croot counted twenty-nine people who appear in significant roles.²⁴ Paul Thompson comments that both "commonplace" and "unusual" characters in *Willy Nilly* "are set on a "collision course."²⁵ Gaynor Graham-Te-Moana comments that "one has the sense that her characters are being staged more as ploys to off-set one another, than as subtlety [sic] dimensioned people in process."²⁶

In the lead-up to Polly's wedding, a succession of characters is introduced. Reviewer Adeane suggests that in this process, "the secret imperfections of [Sonja's] eccentric relatives, friends and neighbours ... are sported, even flaunted,

²² Ebbett 15.

²³ Ash 28.

²⁴ Croot 21.

²⁵ Paul Thompson, "A novel look at the road to the altar," rev. of Renée, *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, by Renée, *Waikato Times* 16 June 1990: 14.

²⁶ Gaynor Graham-Te-Moana, "Willy Nilly: A Novel," rev. of *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, by Renée, *Chaff* June 1990: 8.

for all the world to see.”²⁷ The so-called flaunting of a community’s “secret imperfections,” are flaws—inherent in the would-be coherent hetero-colonialist text—which are exploited in *Willy Nilly*. Though these characters have been read as “unusual” and “unlikely,” it is my contention that each of these characters in *Willy Nilly* is co-requisite in the discursive constitution of the colonialist text of family and, therefore, necessary to their reconstitution as the (writerly) constituents of the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand.

In “a neat reversal of ‘every mother’s dream,’”²⁸ Sonja’s displeasure at the prospect of her daughter’s wedding is one of many deviations from the path of signification which constitutes the legitimating eros of the hetero-colonialist nation. In colonialist discourse the classic deployment of the semic code defines people and places in accordance with the symbolic and cultural order of the British Empire. The writerly adaptation of classic semic coding begins in *Willy Nilly* when the family headed by the lesbian mother hosts the prospective groom, Luke Grant, and his parents St Clair and Daphne, to discuss wedding arrangements.

Reviewer Adeane notes that on arrival St Clair “already had a smile, implying great pleasure, securely in place. He wore a loose natty khaki-coloured linen suit with short sleeves.”²⁹ St Clair’s imperialist, bourgeois genealogy is signified in

²⁷ Adeane 7.

²⁸ Ash 28.

²⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 9.

his confident demeanour in approaching this meeting with his queer in-laws-to-be, and in his chosen attire reminiscent of a colonialist safari suit. The classic operation of the semic code is momentarily disrupted when Luke, introducing Sonja and Evvie to his parents, hesitates in finding an appropriate nomination for Sonja's lover, Evvie. He ultimately chooses to introduce her as Sonja's "friend."³⁰ When reviewer Ebbett also refers to Evvie as Sonja's "friend,"³¹ rather than as her lover or her partner, she too complies with the normative operations of the semic code naming persons in accordance with the symbolic order.

In the writerly text the front parlour signifies the bourgeois hetero-colonialist family home when, for example, Sonja accedes to middle-class convention by inviting the St Clairs: "Come through to the sitting-room."³² Phillipa Tristram argues that in Victorian houses the "little state parlour" was a polite, or public, context, its purpose was to reflect a "universal standard of respectability."³³ Polly breaks with hetero-colonialist convention by leading them all to the sunlit back porch: "'Here's okay, Mum,' ... 'The sitting-room's too dark.'"³⁴ In contrast to the dark and restricted space of the sitting-room, the back porch which "went right

³⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 9.

³¹ Ebbett 15.

³² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 9. Phillipa Tristram, *Living Space: in fact and fiction* (Routledge: London, 1989) points out that in a changing domestic architecture in nineteenth century Britain, the front parlour was also known as the sitting room, the dining parlour, and the drawing-room. Tristram notes that by the time "of Queen Victoria's accession, although more people than ever before possessed front parlours, they tended to be reserved for show" 183. The front parlour was also the place where the owners of many Victorian great houses "separat[ed] themselves progressively from the "other nation" on whose labours they depended" 56.

³³ Tristram 184.

³⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 9.

across the back of the old [Victorian] villa, got all the sun that was going.”³⁵ Compared to dark front parlour the sunlit back porch signifies the opening door of Polly’s queer family closet.³⁶ Hetero-bourgeois conventions having been eschewed, St Clair finds himself in the presence of something queer which is signified by “an uneasy pause.”³⁷ During this uneasy pause Evvie notices that St Clair’s eyes are focused on the bookshelf where “copies of *Pure Lust, Lesbian Woman* and *Desert of the Heart* seemed to leap out at [Evvie].”³⁸

In this sunlit back porch where things continue to signify queerly for St Clair, he asks Sonja—in response to her hesitation about Luke’s and Polly’s proposed marriage—if she has “anything against Luke personally?” Sonja replies: “He’s a man.”³⁹ In what constitutes a writerly deployment of the hermeneutic code, Evvie observes St Clair’s puzzlement at Sonja’s statement:

St Clair sat back on the couch with the expression of one faced with a puzzle to which there is no solution because a fundamental clue has been left out, that kind of statement needs a listener on the same wavelength as

³⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 9.

³⁶ Tristram suggests that homes and their structures are often ignored by literary critics in their examination of novels. For Tristram, the house in fiction, the living space, must be examined for clues on relationships and social structures. She notes, for example, that “from the beginning the house and the novel are interconnected, for the eighteenth century, which saw the rise of the novel was also the great age of the English house” 2.

³⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 10.

³⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 10.

³⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 12-13.

the speaker in order to have the maximum impact. St Clair, not having that kind of antennae, was lost.⁴⁰

In its classic deployment—in the resolution of enigmas—the hermeneutic code pursues a signified that refuses to connote. In its writerly deployment in relation to the enigma of St Clair’s puzzlement, the operation of the hermeneutic “involves a relentless pursuit of new signifieds.”⁴¹ This occurs when St Clair’s paternal privilege within the symbolic and cultural order of the British Empire is multiply and connotatively signified in the writerly text. The Grants live, for example, in “patrician Remuera,”⁴² in a “spacious, architect-designed, many terraced house overlooking the Waitemata.”⁴³ They have a “blue-on blue” kitchen complete with wastemaster, dishwasher, microwave and convection ovens.⁴⁴ They have a bach on Waiheke Island.⁴⁵ On annual holidays they have travel to Hong Kong to enjoy the colonialist spoils of the British Empire.⁴⁶ These “good” signifiers of bourgeois paternal privilege connote the cultural superiority of the British Empire and, thus, St Clair’s puzzlement that Luke’s being “a man” could possibly signify in any other way.

⁴⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 13.

⁴¹ Silverman 256.

⁴² Croot 21.

⁴³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 55.

⁴⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 55.

⁴⁵ A bach (North Island) or crib (South Island) is traditionally a low-cost, unsophisticated holiday residence.

⁴⁶ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 128.

However, these “good” signifiers of bourgeois privilege read less securely in relation to St Clair’s wife, Daphne Grant. Daphne is the secretary of the local garden club. She is a “plump, dark-haired woman [who on the occasion of her first meeting with her queer, future in-laws] wore a loose navy and white sundress and matching jacket, and a chain attached to bifocals hung around her neck.”⁴⁷ In a series of personal remarks and rhetorical questions, Daphne articulates her vicarious privilege within the symbolic and cultural orders of the colonialist nation. She describes herself: “Just a housewife and mother Not very trendy, I’m afraid.”⁴⁸ “I haven’t done anything political. Not like Sonja She’s broken the conventions, brought up Polly, struggled to change things! What have I done? Lived in a comfortable cocoon! ... I haven’t taken any risks!”⁴⁹

Daphne makes it clear that her privilege, afforded via her adherence to hetero-colonialist familial conventions, is a tenuous privilege and one to be safeguarded. She insists that she doesn’t want Luke taking any risks. When Sonja asks Polly, for example: “Why can’t you and Luke just live together,”⁵⁰ Daphne is adamant: ““They can’t just live together! Luke has his career to think of!””⁵¹ Although marriage will afford Luke the hetero-respectability which Daphne considers co-requisite to the bourgeois medical profession, she fears his newly acquired queer family connections will impact on him adversely in the future. With this on her

⁴⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 9.

⁴⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 10.

⁴⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 57-58.

⁵⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 12.

⁵¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 12.

mind she later appeals to St Clair: “There’s hundreds of nice girls in Auckland

Why did he have to meet Polly?”⁵²

The resilient and productive narrative structure of the closet is deployed in *Willy Nilly* during the meeting to discuss the wedding. This takes place when Daphne is suddenly struck by the need to disclose the queer skeleton in their own family closet: “I think we should tell them about [Uncle] Quentin,” Daphne said.⁵³ Uncle Quentin’s private proclivities, as well as his public appearances, signify queerly for the Grant family. St Clair “looked startled but mustered up a skittery laugh. ... ‘My brother,’ he said.”⁵⁴ “He’s got this kink about sun and nature and all that sort of thing.”⁵⁵

Uncle Quentin’s queerness, loosely signified by St Clair as “all that sort of thing” is, for example, a yoga enthusiast, a nudist and a vegetarian who drinks “rosehip tea.”⁵⁶ Due warning is given of the probability of Uncle Quentin’s future queer propensities when Luke describes how he turned up to Luke’s graduation “in a pair of briefs and a sun hat!”⁵⁷ Daphne describes Uncle Quentin as “mad as a hatter.”⁵⁸ Luke says Uncle Quentin “is mad, bonkers, flipped, away with the

⁵² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 56.

⁵³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 19.

⁵⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 19.

⁵⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 19.

⁵⁶ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 121.

⁵⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 20.

⁵⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 123

fairies! Sorry!”⁵⁹ St Clair admits: “Bit of a family skeleton I’m afraid.”⁶⁰ Uncle Quentin signifies as the queer nation’s representative in the Grant family. Despite the offence that may have been taken by their apologies on Uncle Quentin’s behalf, Evvie considers that St Clair and Daphne “were doing very well ... in the middle of a crisis, the proportions of which are totally outside the gamut of your experience.”⁶¹

The revelation of the circumstances of Polly’s queer conception via the services of Theo, a gay “donor,”⁶² signifies another closet being opened in the writerly text, *Willy Nilly*. At twenty, Polly is amazed to learn “that my children’s grandfather was a bloody teaspoon?”⁶³ In this scene “good” signifiers of hetero-familial normativity are reconstituted in the process of articulating a legitimating eros for this queer family. In an effort to explain the queer contingency of Polly’s conception, Sonja insists that Theo “did me a favour ... the biggest favour anyone has ever done me.”⁶⁴ Polly questions the applicability of the signifier “father” in the case of Theo: “You don’t become a father merely by doing someone a

⁵⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 19.

⁶⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 19.

⁶¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 19.

⁶² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 15. Artificial insemination by donor was not a common practice as early as it occurs in *Willy Nilly*, though it became a common method for lesbians to conceive from the mid-to-late 1970s onwards. For a discussion on this practice see Jenny Harper, “Lesbian Mothers AID: artificial insemination by donor,” *Circle* Autumn 1978: 22-24.

⁶³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 15.

⁶⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 18.

favour.”⁶⁵ Sonja explains the queer constitution of this extended family which consists of “[o]nly Cyn, me and Theo, and Theo’s lover [Roland].”⁶⁶

Polly’s preference for a hetero-normatively constituted family is signified by her aversion to “the idea that a lot of people were in on this.”⁶⁷ Theo’s lover, Roland, also objects, though “not [to] Polly so much! [Theo’s] deviousness! I thought we had a commitment!”⁶⁸ When Roland refers to this queer family configuration and the complex situation in which they are all involved as “the whole caboodle,”⁶⁹ what is also connotatively signified is the wider postcolonial context into which this particular family is written: “We’re a rattly lot round here,”⁷⁰ says Sonja, giving voice to the turbulence caused by the multifarious closets being opened in the postcolonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand in the early 1980s.

In the reconstitution of the hetero-colonialist text of family in *Willy Nilly*, multiple and contradictory signifiers attach to the figure of the lesbian mother. Lynne Gifford argues that in the period up to the late 1970s there were two major stereotypes of the lesbian available to “‘heterosexual’ New Zealanders.”⁷¹ These were the radical “out” lesbian and the “closet” lesbian. Gifford proposes that the

⁶⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 79.

⁶⁶ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 18.

⁶⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 18.

⁶⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 65.

⁶⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 64.

⁷⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 19.

⁷¹ Gifford, “The Lesbian as Folk Witch.” Gifford now publishes under the name Lynne Star.

public stereotype of the radical “out” lesbian is one “sexually liberated to the point of license,” such that “lesbian morality” is a contradiction in terms.⁷² Gifford believes that by attacking “the conventions of marriage, monogamy, the family, child-bearing, and sex-roles,” radical “out” lesbians are seen as destroyers of the family and femininity.⁷³ Zimmerman argues that in this kind of context, “to be a lesbian, especially a lesbian mother, is the most unconventional, risky, and even absurd thing one can do.”⁷⁴

Sonja is read as the stereotypical radical “out” lesbian by reviewer Adeane who describes her as “indifferent to society’s censure or approval.”⁷⁵ Sonja’s so-called indifference is contradicted via her own heart-felt testimony to the risks associated with lesbian motherhood. She reveals that “if [my mother] could have taken [Polly] away from me, she would!”⁷⁶ Polly asks Sonja: “Is this why Gran wanted me to live with her?”⁷⁷ Polly’s question signifies both the illegitimate act of her

⁷² Gifford 125.

⁷³ Gifford 125-126. In *Safe Sea*, Zimmerman points out that amongst a range of misnomers, lesbians have been called “race suicidal” 5. See also Christina Simmons, “Companionate Marriage and the Lesbian Threat,” *Frontiers* 4.3 (Fall 1979): 54-59. In *Safe Sea*, Zimmerman also argues that lesbian writing which changes the connotations of lesbian motherhood is part of a rhetorical move in the “aristocratization” and “radical destigmatization” of lesbianism, 45. Zimmerman also points out that novels featuring lesbians as mothers have appeared “as the normality of lesbian existence has become a dominant discourse within the lesbian community” 45.

⁷⁴ Zimmerman, *Safe Sea* 69. Zimmerman finds that “the political reality of lesbian custody cases provides yet another image for the lesbian hero: she may be a mother [who] is similar to the warrior or outlaw ... among the many forms given to the lesbian archetypal hero” 61.

⁷⁵ Adeane 7.

⁷⁶ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 8. The concerns of New Zealand lesbian mothers facing custody issues are addressed in, for example, “Custody case involving a lesbian mother,” *Circle* 2 (1974): 4. See also Yoka Neumann, “Mothers Custody,” *Circle* 37 (1981): 46-50.

⁷⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 19. See Porleen S[immonds], “Lesbian Mothers: Guardianship Amendment Bill,” *Circle* 34 (1980): 34-35.

queer conception and the illegitimate status of lesbian motherhood in the hetero-colonialist nation.⁷⁸ Polly gives an account of the unceasing turbulence of belonging to a queerly constituted family:

I worried about meeting anyone new. What would I say to kids I met for the first time? To their mothers? Mum had told me the score when I was quite little, but all of a sudden I was torturing myself with all sorts of scenarios. Doors slammed in my face, people turning away, shunned by everyone! I wouldn't go through that six months again! Surely you haven't forgotten, Mum?"⁷⁹

In her research on lesbian motherhood in New Zealand, Saphira reported that children such as Polly "live with difference and come to understand it."⁸⁰ Polly, however, has periodic lapses in her understanding of her lesbian mother. She asks Sonja if she remembers when "I said I wished I'd been born to anyone else in the world but you!"⁸¹ On another occasion Polly is overcome with self-pity: "Why can't I have an ordinary family? ... Why can't my mother work in a shop and cook

⁷⁸ *Dyke News* reported the activities of the New Zealand Lesbian Mothers Defence Fund. See Yoka Neumann, "Lesbian Mothers Defence Fund," *Dyke News* June 1983: 15.

⁷⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 40. Issues concerning children in New Zealand lesbian communities were addressed by Jenny Ruth, "Lesbians and Children," *Glad Rag* May 1983: 13-14.

⁸⁰ Saphira 40. Hilary Haines, "Amazon Mothers," rev. of *Amazon Mothers*, by Miriam Saphira, *New Zealand Journal of Psychology* 13.2 (1984) endorses Saphira's assessment that "lesbian mothers provide their children with positive role models that celebrate difference, rather than conformity, surely a positive feature in our rapidly changing society, where the stereotypical nuclear family ... now accounts for less than half of households" 84.

⁸¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 41. In *Amazon Mothers*, Saphira remarks that children who have a mother who is lesbian, or if they have a mother who is single and heterosexual, "know that their family is not the national New Zealand 'Mum, Dad, and the Kids'" 77. Saphira also points out that many New Zealand lesbian mothers worried about the "stigma on their children" 40.

tea for my father every night? ... Why aren't I an orphan? I wish I were dead!"⁸²

Polly's childish outpourings signify her own death as the only solution to life-choices Sonja has made. Sonja's personal solution to the turbulent upheavals they both experience is by "vow[ing] to forget what I could and ignore the rest!"⁸³

The emotional fortitude required of the lesbian mother is signified in *Willy Nilly* via the figure of The Warrior. As Polly's wedding approaches, Evvie begins to reconstruct the garden. Evvie clears an area that "looked unsettled, the black earth speckled here and there with shells."⁸⁴ This small patch of earth multiply signifies a pre-Maori volcanic upheaval, Maori midden remains and a Pakeha rubbish heap. What surfaces for this queer Pakeha family from this shell-speckled, volcanic earth is a metal sculpture which, Sonja tells Evvie, is called "The Warrior." The Warrior signified for its creator, Sonja's former lover, Cynthia, as the archetypal lesbian mother.⁸⁵ The Warrior is queerly configured:

two spiralling circles attached to a wooden base. It was a metre high and had marks carved into the metal "That's the head," said Sonja, pointing to the middle of the first spiral. "See the eyes?".... Evvie eyed the smooth face of the warrior. Funny having a face in the middle of something, she thought, instead of on top.⁸⁶

⁸² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 78.

⁸³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 40.

⁸⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 73.

⁸⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 83.

⁸⁶ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 83.

Having been resurfaced in the midst of considerable family turbulence and confusion, The Warrior signifies both an ancient genealogy and an enduring strength for the figure of the lesbian mother.⁸⁷

Another of the closets of the colonialist nation is opened in a writerly deployment of colonialist discourses of class and sexuality. This occurs on Polly's and Luke's first date. Polly makes an important first disclosure to Luke: "you'd better know my mother's a lesbian."⁸⁸ Sometime later Polly asks if Luke has disclosed this information to Daphne and St Clair. Luke responds casually: "You asked me to tell them. I did. Apart from that, the subject hasn't come up."⁸⁹ Polly is frustrated not only by Luke's inability to comprehend the privileged and protected place he occupies in the hetero-nation, but also by his inability to comprehend that this privilege extends to his middle-class occupation.

Polly asks Luke, "how do you think Mum felt when I told her you were a doctor?"⁹⁰ She points out to him that Sonja objects to Luke precisely because he is a doctor. Polly informs him: "It's not one of [Sonja's] favourite professions, or mine, come to that!"⁹¹ Polly's job as maître d'hotel, is traditionally and nominally

⁸⁷ A support group for New Zealand lesbian mothers was advertised in *Dyke Divulsions* 1 (1982): 2. *Dyke Divulsions* was the newsletter of the Regional Canterbury Women's Decadence Committee. See also Frankie Felton, "Lesbian Mothers Weekend," *Dyke News* July 1983: 12-13.

⁸⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 80.

⁸⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 76. See "Call for contributions to a book about visibility issues for children of lesbians," *Tamaki Makaurau Lesbian Newsletter* Sept. 1992: 5. This material remains unpublished.

⁹⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 77.

⁹¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 77. Reviewer Cunninghame, "Diverse guises blend into interesting novel," notes that "in Ponsonby's feminist circles, [this] rates [Luke] far below Sweeney Todd and Jack the Ripper" 6.

a male occupation. She questions Luke: “What if your friends and colleagues think it’s funny for your wife to work in a hotel?” “Why should they?” he replies. Polly challenges his ignorance: “Come on, Luke ... you’re not that naive. It’s a class thing.”⁹² Luke comments: “I mean no one ever thinks about class these days, do they?”⁹³ Polly counters: “There speaks someone who’s never had to think about it.”⁹⁴

In colonialist discourses the middle-class signifies in relation to heteronormativity. In the writerly text the working-class signifies a range of queer subjectivities. Evvie, for example, is first signified as an academic over-achiever by her working-class hetero-colonialist family who consider that during her high school years she was “get[ting] above herself.”⁹⁵ During the period of her teacher training Evvie “found it easier if [her peers] thought she was devoted to her work.”⁹⁶ Evvie considered that if her fellow teachers’ college students “thought that was why she never went out on dates and only occasionally with a group to the movies or a concert, that suited her fine.”⁹⁷ Then, during a time of withdrawal from the disapproval of peers and family in her late adolescence, Evvie reads Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*.⁹⁸ As a result, Evvie faces her dual

⁹² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 97.

⁹³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 97.

⁹⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 97.

⁹⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 24.

⁹⁶ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 24.

⁹⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 23.

⁹⁸ In *Safe Sea*, Zimmerman points out that prior to coming out the lesbian reader may have “recognized herself in a text” 55.

isolation as a working-class lesbian and moves away “both geographically and emotionally.”⁹⁹ Zimmerman has described this as a diasporic experience:

I think that it makes sense to talk about a gay, lesbian or queer diaspora, both materially and symbolically. Materially, the fact is that movement and uprooting and diaspora really is a factor in many gay and lesbian lives—I mean, the movement from the family home to a new home, from the small town to the city, from the mid country to the coast, from the outskirts to the centre, and this has been a characteristic of gay and lesbian lives since the first gay communities began to develop around the 18th century. So there has been an actual diaspora in gay people’s lives and this is usually in response to both psychic and physical violence which is also a factor in diaspora. So physically, materially and historically, I think that makes sense.¹⁰⁰

The idea of a lesbian diaspora also provides a way of reading the queer trajectory of Sonja’s early adult life. Sonja was outed in a national media frenzy, including “punning headlines in *Truth*,”¹⁰¹ when she left her marriage and ran off with art teacher and sculptor, Cynthia Frewen. They moved from their small town to the metropolitan city of Auckland. Sonja attests to their subsequent isolation: “We hardly knew anyone when we first shifted here and what with the attention we’d

⁹⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 24. *Truth* was a widely distributed New Zealand weekly scandal publication with a history of sensationalising homosexual and lesbian relationships.

¹⁰⁰ Zimmerman, “From Lesbian Nation to Queer Nation” 40.

¹⁰¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 22.

had from *Truth* and other papers, we didn't want to meet anyone for ages."¹⁰² In contrast to the isolation forced on this lesbian couple by an over-exposure to public condemnation, they seek the protection afforded by a political and cultural lesbian community.¹⁰³ This couple is afforded the sanctuary of "the club,"¹⁰⁴ and connections to a wider women's cultural community, via, for example, the Outreach Gallery.¹⁰⁵

The overall disruption of the hetero-colonialist text of family is signified by the presence of the lesbian mother. It is via the lesbian couple, however, that a legitimating eros for the lesbian nation is signified.¹⁰⁶ Sonja's and Evvie's affiliation to a cultural and political lesbian community provides an opportunity for them to be out as a lesbian couple. Evvie reflects on the perceived consequence of Sonja's political activism for other closeted lesbians:

¹⁰² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 18-19. In Saphira's *Amazon Mothers* a survey respondent, who was one of a lesbian couple, remarks: "We were so alone, outcasts in our own families and community" 37.

¹⁰³ In *Safe Sea*, Zimmerman refers to the lesbian couple of this era as "a private structure that must open itself out into the world of politics and communal activity" 93.

¹⁰⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 25. The *K.G. Club Newsletter* assisted in the wider dissemination of *Circle* and other lesbian newsletters by advertising these publications for sale at "the club." See advertisement, *K.G. Club Newsletter* May 1978: 1.

¹⁰⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 24. In *Amazon Mothers*, Saphira refers to the relative absence of a lesbian cultural life in New Zealand up to 1984. She notes that there is "no radio programme for homosexuals [though] there are some magazines and newsletters ... and gay telephone lines" 10.

¹⁰⁶ The metaphor of lesbian nation, in this instance, signifies the mutually-implicated discourses of nationalism and sexuality. See Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger, eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992) who argue that nationalism and sexuality are "two of the most powerful global discourses shaping contemporary notions of identity" 2.

[Sonja] was always around [at the club], often handing out leaflets, coaxing donations for this or that, a good organiser Some of them feared people like Sonja. There'd been too many knock-backs for them to welcome someone whose beliefs would rip away their privacy and hard-won security.¹⁰⁷

Of this lesbian couple, reviewer Stafford comments: "Sonja and Evvie's relationship seems no different from any other in the book, their sexual orientation one among many sources of confrontation and confusion."¹⁰⁸ McLeod, however, alerts readers to the idea that this couple is morally sustained by an eros legitimated in lesbian nation by pointing out that Sonja has "a past of serially monogamous relations, now living with her partner of one year."¹⁰⁹

This legitimating eros for lesbian nation is signified in the writerly text, *Willy Nilly* when Sonja and Evvie are described as "a number, a couple, a relationship, a pair, and, depending on your point of view, they were regarded with admiration or pity, optimism or incredulity, smiles of approval, or frowns of disbelief."¹¹⁰ A legitimating eros for lesbian nation is signified in *Willy Nilly* from the perspective of Fern, who is a younger member of the club committee and a member of the "Theory Group." This group is currently discussing relationships in general, and in

¹⁰⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 24-25.

¹⁰⁸ Stafford 19.

¹⁰⁹ Aorewa McLeod, "Hilarious lead-up to a wedding," rev. of *Willy Nilly: A Novel*, by Renée, *Sunday Star* 6 May 1990: 23.

¹¹⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 26.

particular the theory that “relationships are gradually matching our rapidly changing world, not exactly throw-away, more like recycling, and we should all accept this as inevitable and open ourselves to the concept.”¹¹¹ Fern points out: “Of course, there’s nothing wrong with being comfortable with your generational conditioning, but possessiveness is really a thing of the past, isn’t it?”¹¹²

Signifiers which further connote a legitimating eros for lesbian nation are also evoked when Evvie becomes jealous of Sonja’s ex-lover, Cynthia. Evvie is uncomfortable with the expectation that ex-lovers remain friends in a sisterly fashion and new partners’ jealousies are regarded as patriarchal tendencies which served to divide women from each other.¹¹³ *Willy Nilly*, as a writerly text, makes visible the misfit between political expectation and Evvie’s own emotional reality. Evvie remarks to herself: “I just don’t know why we bother with love. It’s so bad for our characters.”¹¹⁴

In *Willy Nilly*, Alice March signifies in relation to the colonialist text of female subjectivity. The writerly text “opts for heterogeneity rather than unity, and instead of the familiar it looks for the alien and the unpredictable.”¹¹⁵ An incident occurs

¹¹¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 60.

¹¹² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 60. *Circle* published a range of definitions of feminism and lesbian feminism. See *Circle* Spring 1976: 8-11.

¹¹³ In *Safe Sea*, Zimmerman points out that in the 1970s “monogamy had come under attack in the lesbian community as an unhealthy vestige of patriarchy, associated with jealous, possessiveness, ownership—all of which were deemed contrary to the ideal lesbian relationship” 93.

¹¹⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 113.

¹¹⁵ Silverman 246.

which highlights the unpredictability of the relational affect of an illegitimate erotic identity, “because the erotic identity of the person who receives the disclosure is apt also to be implicated in, hence perturbed by it.”¹¹⁶ This takes place in a revelation about Alice March. Anthony March [Jr], Sonja’s brother, presumes their mother’s emotional suffering is located in the circumstances of Sonja’s public outing: “All through that nine-day wonder, the three-inch headlines, the salacious photographs, he’d seen what the scandal had done to his mother. Oh, she put a good face on it, but he knew that inside she was suffering.”¹¹⁷ Alice, it turns out, is troubled not so much by her daughter’s sexuality, but by the unresolved trauma of her sister Louise’s pregnancy and the birth of her niece who, it turns out, is Alice’s husband’s daughter. This child was conceived just prior to Alice’s involvement with him, and several months before Sonja was conceived. Just before Polly’s wedding, Alice discloses to Sonja and Anthony that Louise’s daughter (who died in early infancy) was their cousin/half-sister.¹¹⁸

Alice is not only constituted (read: betrayed) as the classic female subject in a hetero-colonialist symbolic economy, she is also discursively constituted as that same subject in a hetero-colonialist capitalist economy. Alice agrees to an interview for a project essay undertaken by her granddaughter (Sonja’s niece),

¹¹⁶ Sedgwick, “Epistemology” 53.

¹¹⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 51. In *Amazon Mothers*, Saphira reports: “About a quarter of the lesbian mothers found that their parents and family had been upset and sometimes hostile about their sexuality. This ranged from indifference and distance to open hostility and vindictiveness” 39.

¹¹⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 94.

Sarah March. From this interview it is learned that Alice Mary March (née Johnson), was born in Napier 1919. Alice's mother, Norah, was a dressmaker. Alice attended Port Ahuriri Primary School and Napier Girl's High School,¹¹⁹ and left school at fifteen to work at the fabric counter in a department store: "When she turned seventeen she got the sack because there was another fifteen-year-old wanting a job and fifteen-year-olds were cheaper."¹²⁰

The hetero-colonialist subjectivity of Alice March is constituted via the "good" signifiers of woman's duty and service. Alice's father, Anthony Johnson, a guard on the railways, had explained union principles to her. She subsequently became a union secretary: "I thought I was going to be some sort of Joan of Arc leading the workers to a new utopia, but I found out it doesn't work like that."¹²¹ Alice met her husband James Thomas March at a meeting of the Shop Assistant's Union where they "talked for hours about the revolution for the workers that unions would bring about."¹²² Alice recalls her earlier "vision of a society where reason and justice meant that employers and employees would work together for a better world, but after her first union meeting that changed."¹²³ She "remembered how the young Alice's naiveté had amused, her enthusiasm irritated and her sex

¹¹⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 118.

¹²⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 119.

¹²¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 119.

¹²² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 93.

¹²³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 119.

antagonised, but her willingness to take on the administrative grind was accepted with grudging approval.”¹²⁴

When it was realised that she “didn’t have the nous to expect favours in return for all this donkey-work, the union stalwarts felt only disdain.”¹²⁵ Her applications for full-time employment with the union were repeatedly unsuccessful.¹²⁶ She gained the respect of union members, but only “as long as I stayed inside the area they assigned me ... closing [my] eyes to the disparity between what they said about equality and what they actually did.”¹²⁷ When she stopped working in the shop at sixty-five her employers gave her a tea-set. The union gave her a book on “the history of unions in New Zealand.”¹²⁸ The speech given at her union retirement farewell was about “the back-room girl.”¹²⁹ Alice judged both her greatest success and her greatest failure to be the same thing, her work for the union.¹³⁰

It is only in her later years that Alice rereads her discursive location in a colonialist capitalist and symbolic economy. Polly is frustrated that her mother and her grandmother don’t see this connection which exists between them. Polly

¹²⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 119.

¹²⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 119.

¹²⁶ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 120.

¹²⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 119-20.

¹²⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 120.

¹²⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 120.

¹³⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 120.

expresses her frustration: “It’s so childish! There’s Gran, worked all her life for the union, and here’s Mum, working her gut’s out for women’s rights, the gay task force, all that stuff! Wouldn’t you think they’d just sit down and talk it out?”¹³¹

Repercussions of Alice’s perceived lack of understanding of the sexual politics of a lesbian identity in a colonialist symbolic economy are felt by Evvie who confronts the spectre of the lesbian closet when she considers that Sonja may want her to move out when Alice comes to stay.¹³² Evvie thinks that Alice “might not like me ... I mean the fact of me!”¹³³ The fact is that Evvie signifies an illegitimizing eros in the hetero-colonialist nation.

The writerly text also signifies the female colonialist subject via the figure of Sonja’s sister-in-law, Shirley March. Shirley objects to her mother-in-law’s insistence on being called Alice. For Shirley: “It just didn’t seem right.”¹³⁴ She explains that her brother called his mother-in-law “Nanna.”¹³⁵ Shirley’s way around the problem of an inappropriate familial nomination is to never address Alice directly. When she spoke about her to Anthony she always said “‘your mother’ or ‘she.’”¹³⁶ Shirley’s daughter, Sarah, decides to pursue a career in law after a visit to her high school by a woman lawyer. Shirley considers law to be inappropriate vocational choice for a young woman and one that she considers, in

¹³¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 34.

¹³² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 33.

¹³³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 34.

¹³⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 47.

¹³⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 47.

¹³⁶ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 47.

the case of her daughter, will be short-lived: “She won’t stick to it ... She’ll meet someone and that’ll be that!”¹³⁷ Shirley March’s considered opinion, “that’ll be that!” signifies her confidence that the symbolic and cultural order of the hetero-colonialist nation—where the female subject’s first duty is service is to the family—will prevail over a schoolgirl’s fancy.

Luke Grant is multiply signified in *Willy Nilly* as a prime beneficiary of the privileges accorded to the male adherents to the symbolic and cultural orders of the colonialist nation. Compared to the disordered lives of his queer, future in-laws, Luke Grant lives in a relatively benign world. He is a medical school graduate and has been recently offered a good position in Dunedin. By his own admission he has “never experienced real money worries, never had difficulty getting a job or finding somewhere to live.”¹³⁸ Luke “didn’t think studying for exams was boring.”¹³⁹ He made friends easily, looked forward to medical school and had good professional contacts through his father.¹⁴⁰ Luke’s benign world begins to look less secure as the prospect of marrying Polly opens up a queer familial terrain. His worries are based, partly, on the way this family is constituted by the two queer couples, Sonja and Evvie, Theo and Roland, who correspond to a lesbian-mother-in-law, a gay father-in-law, and their respective queer partners.

¹³⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 48.

¹³⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 124.

¹³⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 124.

¹⁴⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 124.

Luke is conscious that these people who are part of Polly's world "would become part of his."¹⁴¹

In the writerly text the semic code frequently functions incoherently. The lesbian mother, for example, signifies considerable dignity in the figure of The Warrior. The lesbian mother is also signified disrespectfully when Luke is reduced to a schoolboyish witticism, referring to Sonja as: "My mother-in-law, the lezzie-bin!"¹⁴² Luke is reduced to speechlessness in the case of Polly's father when he asks her: "Are you worried about your, ah, Theo?"¹⁴³ In a writerly return to coherent signifiers of the hetero-colonialist nation, Luke considers that Polly is "his other half," in respect of which "he hoped he was hers."¹⁴⁴

Alex Calder argues that "the joint entanglement of Maori and European in colonialism has been the most salient context for the stories we tell about ourselves, of the place, to each other."¹⁴⁵ The "thing in common" in telling these stories Calder considers to be the exploration of what it means to be from a particular place, an exploration which is both guided by and produces a sense of history as well as "registering an awareness of cultural boundaries."¹⁴⁶ The

¹⁴¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 135.

¹⁴² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 76.

¹⁴³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 62.

¹⁴⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 124.

¹⁴⁵ Alex Calder, ed., "Introduction," *The Writing of New Zealand: Inventions and Identities* (Auckland: Reed Books, 1993) 9. This selection of writings "track the forms of local experience" 9.

¹⁴⁶ Calder 11. Calder regards *The Writing of New Zealand* as an exploration of "our solidarities and our separateness" where writers "gather and regather our boundaries" 14.

writerly text, *Willy Nilly*, provides a number of opportunities for reading “the joint entanglement” of Maori and Pakeha in colonialism. This joint entanglement in colonialist discourses occurs in the context of the Scott whanau/family which lives next door to Sonja, Evvie and Polly. Cora Scott (née Hirini) is Sonja’s best friend. Cora is a Maori, working-class mother with an alcoholic Pakeha husband, Clive Scott, a drunk, tyre-factory worker, who has recently deserted Cora and their children, Andrea aged sixteen, Robbie aged fourteen, and the twins Melly and Matthew, aged around five years old. Cora is a machinist at Snow’s Clothing Factory. She has whanau/family connections to The Hirini Mafia in industrial Avondale, and to the Hoani Waititi Marae.

The narrative structure of the closet is deployed in the writerly reconstitution of this postcolonial whanau/family. In this context signifiers of sexuality, class and race abound. The Scott whanau/family is queered in the first instance, by the circumstances of Cora’s conception and upbringing. Cora’s father had “taken himself off the minute he’d heard the news.”¹⁴⁷ Cora was subsequently brought up by her grandmother, Nanny. The semic code, which defines persons in accordance with the symbolic and cultural orders, is repeatedly disrupted in the context of Cora’s whanau/family when, for example, “one of Cora’s trickier tasks is to explain to her children that [Honey] the person they think of as their aunt is really

¹⁴⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 44.

their grandmother.”¹⁴⁸ Cora’s birth mother Honey Hirini, signifies queerly as her sister.¹⁴⁹

After having one sign of her family’s queer configuration explained to her, Melly seeks further clarification: ““So [my] Uncle Henry’s your uncle.””¹⁵⁰ “And my brother,” Cora explains.¹⁵¹ The rest of the Hirini whanau is correspondingly queered. Henry’s wife, Girlie Hirini, is Cora’s sister-in-law/aunt by marriage. Meri is also Cora’s sister/aunt, Meri’s husband, Tom, is Cora’s brother-in-law/uncle by marriage, Lucy is Cora’s sister/aunt, Thomas and Eddie Hirini are Cora’s brothers/uncles.

For Cora’s working-class family/whanau, jobs and private transport are not taken for granted.¹⁵² That this whanau is not entirely dependent on a capitalist (read: colonialist) economy is signified by the fact that Henry and Girlie live on Maori land, “a large section [in Avondale] that stretched down to the Whau river. The flounder nets were draped over the jetty and long the line strung between two willows.”¹⁵³ From this Maori land and traditional Maori fishing ground Henry and

¹⁴⁸ Croot 21.

¹⁴⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 68. Here the term queer signifies in opposition to a colonialist discourse of a hetero-normative family properly configured within a, preferably, christian marriage. See Chapter Eight for a fuller explanation of this signifying process.

¹⁵⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 68.

¹⁵¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 68.

¹⁵² Henry explains to Cora: “my car’s kaput ... there’s a bus leaves town about seven” 42.

¹⁵³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 43.

Girlie are able to provide, partially, for themselves and their wider whanau/family network.

On the occasion of a whanau gathering at Henry's and Girlie's, Cora's husband Clive is deeply offended when Joe Hirini, Cora's cousin/nephew, who is a meat inspector faced with redundancy with the impending closure of the meatworks, refers to the "bloody honkies" at his workplace.¹⁵⁴ Clive, who is accustomed to having his racial superiority affirmed, insists on leaving. Cora, who is heavily pregnant at the time, is distressed. The following day she miscarries. Clive blames the miscarriage on Joe, calls him a "murderer" and threatens them all with the police if they try to get in touch with Cora.¹⁵⁵ Clive gives Cora a choice: "Me and the kids or this bloody lot!"¹⁵⁶ Compared to her own father's desertion of her mother, Cora had been "passionately grateful that [Clive] should show no reluctance to marry her when she told him about Andrea."¹⁵⁷ In retrospect, Cora regrets having been "a bit soft in those days,"¹⁵⁸ and that she didn't have "the guts to face up to Clive."¹⁵⁹

Her earlier fears of the potential consequences of defying her husband are justified in light of the repercussions which occur after she goes to watch a protest march

¹⁵⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 43.

¹⁵⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 44.

¹⁵⁶ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 42.

¹⁵⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 44.

¹⁵⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 42.

¹⁵⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 29.

against the Springbok Tour in 1981.¹⁶⁰ Clive goes to watch the rugby game and sees her there.¹⁶¹ That night, as a punishment for Cora's transgression of the symbolic and cultural orders of the colonialist nation, Clive rapes her.¹⁶² In this act of racist and misogynist violence, the twins Matthew and Melly are conceived. This violence effectively ends any intimacy that may have existed between Clive and Cora at this point in their relationship.

In Clive's more recent absence, Cora begins the process of reuniting herself and her children with their Maori whanau and whakapapa.¹⁶³ This process has been prompted by Matthew's and Melly's schoolteacher, whom Cora judges to be "fresh out of college, [and] who, no doubt, was on the right lines in thinking that pride in your race had to start somewhere, but who didn't have a clue about the daily hurts and snubs you put up with."¹⁶⁴ In so saying, Cora points to the schoolteacher's well-meaning, though somewhat naive attempts to fulfil bicultural teaching objectives.

In colonialist discourse the Scott family is raced-classed Maori-proletariat. When Cora's daughter, Andrea Scott, who left school at sixteen and "got a job waitressing, [she] stopped pretending she had any respect for a father who boozed

¹⁶⁰ For a lesbian perspective on the racist sporting politics of the 1981 Springbok rugby tour see Pilar Alba, "Who is Steve Biko, does he live in Ponsonby?," *Bitches, Witches and Dykes* 1.4 (1981): 4-6.

¹⁶¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 44.

¹⁶² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 165.

¹⁶³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 68.

¹⁶⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 29.

away most of the money he earned.”¹⁶⁵ Andrea tries to shake off the colonialist (read: racist and classist) stereotype of Maori portrayed via mainstream media culture:

[She] went all out to make sure her family was seen as neat, clean, well-fed, and well looked after. It was as if [she] was mad keen to show the world that this family at least, wasn't like the grubby, lazy, guitar-playing, beer drinking beneficiaries you heard about on radio talk-backs or in letters to the editor.¹⁶⁶

Andrea takes up a one-person struggle against colonialist class and race prejudices. Her brother Robbie engages in a solitary attempt to confirm not only these colonialist class and race prejudices, but also the anti-woman prejudices he learns from his father, Clive: “You watch yourself, Robbie, don't fall into the trap I did! They're all the same, all over you like a rash until you're down and then they just throw you aside Come on, son, let's leave them to it!”¹⁶⁷

Robbie's thoughts are centred on when, or whether, his father will come home: “It's all your fault,” he tells Cora.¹⁶⁸ Trying to understand his own feelings of dislocation, Robbie thinks: “The trouble with people like his mother and Uncle

¹⁶⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 28.

¹⁶⁶ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 29.

¹⁶⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 30.

¹⁶⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 27.

Henry and Auntie Girlie was that they didn't face up to change. They lived in the past. They didn't realise that life was different now."¹⁶⁹ Robbie yells at Cora: "You want to go and live in the pa, you go!"¹⁷⁰ Robbie's speculations about Henry's and Girlie's naiveté contrasts with Cora's understanding as to why he has defaced her wedding photograph: "You don't have to tell me. I know. I'm a big fat Maori and you hate the sight of me!"¹⁷¹ She confronts him on his return; "you can cut me out of the photo but you can't get away from me! Look in the mirror, boy!"¹⁷² When he walks out after this outburst, Cora has an image of "street kids sniffing from large plastic bags while they huddled under bridges, pictures of big-eyed skinny kids hanging around video parlours, frames of a movie where a boy stumbled out of a pub and was sick in the gutter."¹⁷³

Robbie's disaffected behaviour also draws attention to him at school where "because he had the right coloured skin everyone expected him to be crazy about [Maori history]."¹⁷⁴ What Robbie wanted "to shout at all of them, his mother, his teachers and now Henry and Girlie, was that life had nothing to do with Rangi and Papa. It had to do with money No money meant cheap food, thin blankets, hating to ask for money for books, school trips, sports fees."¹⁷⁵ Robbie's social

¹⁶⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 98.

¹⁷⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 98.

¹⁷¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 32.

¹⁷² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 32.

¹⁷³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 30.

¹⁷⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 99.

¹⁷⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 99.

studies teacher, Ray Glasser, complains to his colleague, Anthony March (Sonja's brother) about Robbie:

I swear to God I'll end up doing time for Robbie Scott! I have tried to ignore his farting around, and I use that word advisedly, but when he drew swastikas all over our Third World project I decided what we need is another world war so trouble-makers like him can go off and get rid of all that excess energy, and hopefully themselves at the same time!¹⁷⁶

In linking signifiers of British Imperialism and fascist nationalism, Robbie's protest signifies a rereading of his personal dislocation. His teacher's solution—Robbie's self-annihilation in a capitalist inspired war—is commensurate with imperialist strategies and objectives.

Robbie's attitude towards his school curriculum is based on his understanding of the economic and cultural effects of British Imperialism on an indigenous people. These insights are not reflected in his misogynist attitude towards women which spills over into his homophobic disrespect for his lesbian neighbours. He is not keen on attending the wedding which he knows his father would disapprove of: "Dad'd say ... that us kids shouldn't be going ... he's never liked Sonja."¹⁷⁷ He tells Cora: "I'm not going ... [a]nyway I thought dykes didn't believe in marriage?"¹⁷⁸ Cora reminds Robbie that Sonja has wiped his bum many times,

¹⁷⁶ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 50.

¹⁷⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 126.

¹⁷⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 126.

and that Clive doesn't like Sonja, not because she is a lesbian, but because she's seen him drunk too many times.¹⁷⁹ In this writerly interchange Robbie articulates the symbolic and cultural order of the British Empire, while Cora's response signifies in opposition to the colonialist text of lesbian subjectivity.

A solution for Robbie's predicament is found outside of colonialist capitalist objectives. Robbie is placed under the protection and guidance of his cousin/second cousin Dean who describes himself as part of the Hirini Mafia.¹⁸⁰ Robbie insists to Dean: "You don't have to worry about me," to which Dean replies: "I'm not ... but my father is, so that means I'm involved whether I want to be or not."¹⁸¹ Dean makes it clear that outside of colonialist networks there is a whanau network of responsibility and reward to which they both belong.

The "joint entanglement" of Maori and Pakeha takes place in *Willy Nilly* not so much, as Calder suggests, in registering cultural boundaries as in also registering an awareness of shared politics. This occurs in *Willy Nilly* when Mattie Hirini, Cora's cousin/nephew who is a political activist, goes to Waitangi on the same occasion as do lesbian activists from "the club" to which Evvie and Sonja belong.¹⁸² Sonja remarks to Evvie that while "the presence of Pakeha support for Maori protest had been appreciated ... The group from the club had stayed in the

¹⁷⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 126.

¹⁸⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 103. The Hirini Mafia signifies a family bound by a mutually supportive economic network.

¹⁸¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 101.

¹⁸² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 45

background.”¹⁸³ The shared nature of the politics of a Waitangi Day protest manifest as a permeable boundary where, however, Maori visibility takes precedence over the visibility of lesbian supporters.

The colonialist text of family is queered in the Scott family in its Maori/Pakeha constitution. It is also queered via its internal familial configurations, and queered again by association with its lesbian neighbours. Anthony March expresses the queer nature of the association between his sister, Sonja, and Robbie as one of his frustrations: “Trust Sonja to live next door to Robbie Scott!”¹⁸⁴ Given the joint entanglement of these families, Luke wonders “how someone like Cora [Scott] would regard him[?]”¹⁸⁵ Of equal importance is the other question: “What did he know about people like Cora?”¹⁸⁶ Together, in the writerly text, *Willy Nilly*, these questions signify that both Cora and Luke are challenged in relationship to hetero-colonialist family traditions, challenges which signify for them both “the beginning of a richer, if more demanding season.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 59-60. For a report on Maori and tauwi lesbians involvement in protests and campaigns for Maori sovereignty and in anti-racism activities see, for example, “Project Waitangi,” *Tamaki Makaurau Lesbian Newsletter* Mar. 1995: 1+. At this time Project Waitangi, which was partially funded by the Department of Justice, was a forum for lesbian activism around Treaty issues. See also Lisa Rakena, Bubs Waipouri, Milton Masters, and Marie Rakena, “Waitangi,” *Lesbians in Print* 6 (1986): 7. A national lesbian politics of race was also addressed by Felicity Day, “Pakeha women focus on the treaty,” *Lesbians in Print* 6 (1986): 7-8. A Special Issue, *Lesbians in Print: Wahine Maori Oketopa/Noema* (1988) printed the “Articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi” in Maori and English, 5. See also “Waitangi 1983,” *Dyke News* Nov. 1982: 16. Protest actions have included calls to cease all immigration and to re-instate Maori sovereignty. In this context, claims to Maori sovereignty and/or Maori Nation represent forms of anticolonial nationalism predicated on the basis of *first peoples*’ spiritual and ancestral rights and relationships to land.

¹⁸⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 67.

¹⁸⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 124.

¹⁸⁶ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 124.

¹⁸⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 125.

The queer text of the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand is multiply signified in the final scenes which take place on the day of Polly's and Luke's wedding. Polly's feelings signify queerly in opposition to conventional wisdom: "My wedding day ... Today is my wedding day, so why aren't I ecstatically happy?"¹⁸⁸ The lesbian and gay couples have already discussed how they should present themselves. Roland has asked Theo: "So what are you going to wear? Father of the bride and all that?"¹⁸⁹ The queer couples make concerted efforts to not transgress the hetero-sanctity of Polly's wedding day. Evvie has consciously dressed in new cream trousers and shoes.¹⁹⁰ St Clair and Luke, for whom no such problem manifests, looked "very nice" in similarly subdued colours.¹⁹¹

Despite the best efforts of most queer family members to signify in accordance with the hetero-colonialist conventions of the occasion, signifiers of an underlying queerness abound. As queer nation's blatant representative in the Grant family, Uncle Quentin wore "a minute pair of white cotton shorts [and] pinned a red rose to a piece of ribbon and tied [it] round his head ... like Gloria Swanson, without the make-up."¹⁹² Uncle Quentin's queer looks are matched by those of Sonja's

¹⁸⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 115.

¹⁸⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 111.

¹⁹⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 130. A respondent in Saphira's *Amazon Mothers* survey of lesbian mothers talks about attending a wedding where the daughter of a lesbian was getting married. The respondent remarked: "Actually the wedding went off smoothly. New Zealanders are very polite and don't want to rock the boat [though] there were a few strange looks as Barbra [the lover of the mother of the bride] was opening the door in her nice striped suit" 50.

¹⁹¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 128.

¹⁹² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 128.

former lover, Cyn, who arrives as “a mass of startlingly bright colours ... Red hair, orange, yellow and purple top over green and mauve pants.”¹⁹³ Not only is Cyn’s attire ill-suited to the occasion, Cyn also makes a public announcement in defiance of the codes of hetero-familial duty and obligation in her exhortation to her former lover, Dolores, whom she chances to meet on this family occasion: “This time you’re coming with me, and no bloody nieces and nephews needing a nanny are going to stop you! I’ve claimed you ... and you’re mine!”¹⁹⁴

Alongside Sonja and Evvie, and the newly reconstituted lesbian couple Cyn and Dolores, other lesbian couples proliferate at the wedding. Sonja’s friend Sal, takes a fancy to the younger Bamboo.¹⁹⁵ The theoretically minded, keyboard-playing dyke, Fern, is accompanied by Jan on the guitar.¹⁹⁶ Fern realises “that the list of songs she’d prepared from her parents’ suggestions was proving highly unsuitable.”¹⁹⁷ As Luke’s late arrival is becoming very obvious to everyone, Fern’s choice of *Leaving on a Jet Plane* proves inappropriate, in so far as it signifies in contradiction to the happy-ever-after signifying path of the classic text of the perfect wedding day.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 141.

¹⁹⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 142.

¹⁹⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 139.

¹⁹⁶ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 139.

¹⁹⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 139.

¹⁹⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 139.

While family, whanau and other guests await Luke's arrival, the barely submerged queer text—which exists as an ever present challenge to hetero-convention—is depicted via “a cacophony of voices all trying to keep their excitement, pity, suspicion and dread under control, and failing.”¹⁹⁹ Amidst this group of anxiously waiting wedding guests The Warrior continues to signify queerly, as the archetypal lesbian mother, and arbitrarily, for a number of the wedding guests. A group of men and women discuss the sculpture's form and content “knowledgeably.”²⁰⁰ One person remarks on its “essential austerity,” another finds it a “lavish concept.”²⁰¹ Evvie looked across at the Warrior “standing untouched by the drama. Wish I'd left you in the ground, she thought. There's been nothing but trouble since I dug you up.”²⁰² In this context “trouble” connotes the confusion of representation posed by its queer presence.

As the archetypal lesbian mother, The Warrior “looked as though it, too, had put down roots and was growing out of the earth, an exotic specimen of some strange new flower.”²⁰³ Evvie notices that “The Warrior seemed to be practising some kind of meditative plan designed to slow down the moment. All was still.”²⁰⁴ Evvie keeps her eyes on The Warrior and observes that in its presence Cora's own

¹⁹⁹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 138.

²⁰⁰ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 137.

²⁰¹ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 137.

²⁰² Renée, *Willy Nilly* 142.

²⁰³ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 132.

²⁰⁴ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 132.

“steel was showing.”²⁰⁵ The writerly text signifies that Cora’s “steel” lies in the buried truths more recently surfaced in her life. The “moment,” for Cora, is a queerly constituted present informed by a colonialist past. Slowed down, this moment signifies a multiply queered present for a variety of family, friends and strangers all gathered together for this “oddball wedding.”²⁰⁶ In a closing scene the classic text of the hetero-colonialist Pakeha family is, however, queered in full public ceremony. This occurs when, in a recognition of their shared relationship as the queer partners of the parents of the bride, “Roland smiled at Evvie,”²⁰⁷ and then, finding their own rightful places in this queerly reconstituted family, the gay couple, Theo and Roland “took their places on Evvie’s left.”²⁰⁸

In the writerly process of opening the multifarious closets of the colonialist nation, *Willy Nilly* makes visible the radical sexual transformations which are registered within the larger cultural order when sexual difference is belied.²⁰⁹ In particular, the legitimating eros of the colonialist nation New Zealand is queered in the writerly text by the presence of the lesbian couple. The writerly text, *Willy Nilly*, also signifies the multi-dimensional presence of the lesbian mother in the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand.²¹⁰ In this writerly process, Renée has

²⁰⁵ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 138.

²⁰⁶ Ash 28.

²⁰⁷ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 63.

²⁰⁸ Renée, *Willy Nilly* 146.

²⁰⁹ Silverman 272.

²¹⁰ In *Amazon Mothers*, Saphira points out that while “overseas literature may highlight the major issues for lesbians, New Zealand has its own environment and milieu for lesbian mothers to deal with” 9. Haines takes to task psychologists and psychiatrists “and other members of the so-called helping professions [who] have a lot to answer for in the way they have approached lesbian issues

addressed the need expressed by Saphira who argues that “New Zealand’s future lies not in following overseas trends but in developing its own ethnic family patterns of loving and living, [where] lesbian mothers, will be part of this.”²¹¹ In these ways, Renée has contributed to an “ideological shift in which many lesbians and gay men [have begun] to portray themselves as people who seek not only to maintain ties with blood or adoptive relations, but also to establish families of their own.”²¹²

Reviewer Absalom considers that in New Zealand “we have reached a stage where it’s possible to write a novel whose main characters include lesbians and gays.”²¹³

Renée has confirmed the possibility to which Absalom refers. I have addressed the possibility of reading such a text. While reviewer Minehan suggested that *Willy Nilly* was “guaranteed to appeal to a wide audience of readers,”²¹⁴ I found that not to be generally the case amongst reviewers. Amongst the few reviewers who have been able to read the writerly text of *Willy Nilly*, McLeod points out that there is:

a lot in the novel ... to shake up our concepts of what is normal and/or acceptable. In the central portrayal of the lesbian family—its interactions, its

in the past. They have been the main perpetrators of the idea of homosexuality as a mental illness” 84.

²¹¹ Saphira, *Amazon Mothers* 77.

²¹² Weston 17. Weston argues that the discourse of gay families that emerged during the 1980s with an emphasis on the kinship character of the ties gay people had forged to close friends and lovers, and its demand that those ties receive social and legal recognition, and its separation of parenting and family formation from heterosexual relations, “challenged any cultural representations and common practices that had effectively denied lesbians and gay men access to kinship” 21-22.

²¹³ Absalom 21.

²¹⁴ Minehan 25.

aberrations, its family history, Renée has given readers an insight that you won't find anywhere else in New Zealand literature.²¹⁵

Reviewer Ebbett argues: "No one knows the New Zealand scene better than Renée."²¹⁶ My reading of the writerly text, *Willy Nilly*, has made manifest a connection between the scene of a New Zealand literature and of a New Zealand lesbian literature.

According to Barthes, "the symbolic structure is completely reversible: it can be read in any direction."²¹⁷ *Willy Nilly*, in its seemingly haphazard, wandering, changeable, arbitrary, and uncertain path of signification, which "denies the possibility of closure," is a text written in a signifying relationship to the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand.²¹⁸ In the writerly text, *Willy Nilly*, various instances of (the text of) lesbian subjectivity manifests the lesbian text in the postcolonial (read: queer) nation Aotearoa New Zealand.

²¹⁵ McLeod, "Hilarious" 23.

²¹⁶ Ebbett 15.

²¹⁷ Barthes, *S/Z* 67.

²¹⁸ Silverman 246.

CHAPTER SIX

THE COLONIALIST TEXT OF EMPIRE IN *DAISY AND LILY*

The central protagonist in *Daisy and Lily* is Daisy Carter, an ageing, working-class, Maori lesbian.¹ Charlotte Carter (née Porohiwi), is Daisy's mother. Lily Sanson is Daisy's childhood sweetheart. Lily is Pakeha. Daisy and Lily have been estranged for forty years. They have recently been reunited and now live together. In the meantime, Lily has been raped. Magda Porohiwi, Daisy's Uncle Auntie, is a Maori transsexual queen who owns Magda's Escort Agency. After Uncle Auntie's violent death, Daisy begins to write her own "life's course."²

Daisy and Lily was generally not well-received by reviewers. A range of reviews were characterised by a certain hostility towards the subject matter of the novel. Reviewer Payne asserts that *Daisy and Lily* "will not be read by those threatened by the concept of lesbianism."³ Reviewer Kay remarks on the "moral position" taken by Renée.⁴ Reviewer Cooper finds *Daisy and Lily* to be "a tough, cynical book ... business-like in its analysis of sexual and racial prejudice [and] urban savagery."⁵ Reviewers also responded adversely to the number and diversity of the characters in *Daisy and Lily*. Reviewer McLean finds "an overabundance of

¹ For a New Zealand lesbian perspective on colonialist discourses of sexuality, race and class see Trish, "What Price a Lesbian Revolution?— A Cry From the Lesbian Ghetto," *Glad Rag* May 1983: 15-16.

² Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 11.

³ Payne 17.

⁴ Kay 8.

⁵ Cooper 155-56.

superfluous bit players caused confusion and detracted from the book's readability."⁶ Reviewer Murray considers that there are "too many peripheral characters [as] Renée tries to squeeze in some seventy poorly-differentiated 'extras' who come and go with a bewildering array of names."⁷

In my reading I demonstrate how a degree of signifying flexibility is achieved via the sexual diversity of characters represented in the writerly text, *Daisy and Lily*. This sexual diversity manifests a legitimating eros for the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand. The Barthesian strategy for uncovering the symbolic and cultural codes of the classic text is via their connotative potential. A signifying diversity is promoted by means of this "correlation immanent in the text."⁸ In my reading I demonstrate how *Daisy and Lily* can be read as a writerly rereading of the densely coded colonialist text of hetero-normative sexual citizenship connotatively signified in relationship to the cultural and symbolic codes of the British Empire. Each connotation is "simultaneously the 'invasion' of the text by a code, and a digression away from the text toward the larger discursive field."⁹

In the classic text the proairetic code establishes fixed sequences of actions via the syntagmatic alignment of signifiers. Daisy's "life's course" is a non-linear narrative. In a writerly fragmentation of the forward moving colonialist text, Daisy

⁶ McLean 22.

⁷ Murray 35.

⁸ Barthes *S/Z* 8.

⁹ Silverman 239.

haphazardly gathers up events from her past.¹⁰ By fragmenting the colonialist text and revealing the codes responsible for its enunciation “the writerly project ‘displaces’ the reader ... from the all-too-familiar subject-position of the existing cultural regime.”¹¹ Daisy states her reasons for writing her life’s course: “So Lily and Uncle Auntie would know that I understood there was more than one way of looking at things. You don’t believe everything just because it’s written down. You have to be wary.”¹²

In my reading of *Daisy and Lily* I impose a rough chronology on Daisy’s otherwise fragmented “life’s course.” I do so in order to illustrate a certain inevitability produced in classic signifying practices. In writing her “life’s course” Daisy attributes a particular value to memory. She suggests that “because memory reshapes and refines ... you’re likely to end up with a distilled essence which could perhaps give a truer flavour of the past than the mere facts.”¹³ Daisy subjects particular memories to a process of distillation, or rereading, which enables her to trace their “truth” to colonialist discourses.

¹⁰ In *S/Z*, Barthes argues that “it is the *direction* of meaning which determines the two major management functions of the classic text: the *author* is always supposed to go from signified to signifier, from content to form, from idea to text, from passion to expression, and in contrast, the *critic* goes in the other direction, works back from signifiers to signified ... the *author* is a god (his place of origin is the signified); as for the critic, he is the priest whose task is to decipher the Writing of the god,” 174.

¹¹ Silverman 248-49.

¹² Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 15.

¹³ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 16.

The metaphor of home functions as a denotative signified in classic texts of the British Empire.¹⁴ In *Daisy and Lily* the metaphor of home connotatively signifies in relationship to homelessness. This signifying process occurs in Daisy's childhood home with her Maori mother, Charlotte, and her Pakeha father, Wardie; in Daisy's home with Charlotte; in Daisy's domestic home-life with her Pakeha husband Spenser; in the women's refuge "The Haven;" in Daisy's home with Lily; in the city where a sexual diaspora regathers; and in the home where Uncle Auntie is murdered. In this process an emergent postcolonial (read: queer) subjectivity emerges for Daisy. This manifests as a growing awareness of her own turangawaewae.

In *Daisy and Lily* the British Empire is connotatively signified in relationship to a colonialist discourse of raced-respectability. This occurs in the context of (Pakeha) Wardie's and (Maori) Charlotte's home. Wardie declares: "I didn't have to marry [Charlotte], but I did Lot's [sic] of men wouldn't have."¹⁵ Charlotte's unrespectable, out-of-wedlock pregnancy is raced-incontinent.¹⁶ As a consequence of Wardie's failure to comply with the colonialist symbolic (read: racist) code preventing miscegenation, Wardie's mother "died of shame."¹⁷ By agreeing to marry Charlotte, Wardie offers her a respectable home. Even though Wardie and his mother both sacrifice for Charlotte, it is Charlotte, not Wardie,

¹⁴ See Chapter Two for a fuller explanation of this signifying process in a colonialist discourse.

¹⁵ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 27.

¹⁶ See Chapter Two for a fuller explanation of the discursive constitution of "sexual incontinence" as already feminised and raced-black.

¹⁷ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 26.

who carries the burden of a sexed-gendered-sexualised-raced-classed colonialist subjectivity.

When Wardie dies, Charlotte and Daisy are forced to move from their home, which was rented to (Pakeha) Wardie, not (Maori) Charlotte. The landlord signifies Wardie's raced-white respectability in his remark about Charlotte: "you could never tell with those people, could you?"¹⁸ The classic text of Wardie's raced-respectability is contested in the writerly text, *Daisy and Lily*, when Charlotte and Daisy are forced to move away from the old neighbourhood. Daisy remarks that they are moving away from "from the people who'd known Wardie, who'd witnessed his staggering home ... who might even have heard them yelling at each other and Wardie bawling about bloody Maoris."¹⁹ Daisy's remark signifies that, apart from herself, there are others for whom there is "more than one way of looking at things."

Despite their intentions of starting a better life, Daisy's subsequent home with Charlotte is also both physically and emotionally unsafe. Charlotte blames Daisy for her enduring misery and unrespectability: "It's all your bloody fault. If it hadn't been for you I wouldn't have married him. If it hadn't been for you I'd have been okay. But no, you had to shove your oar in. You ruined my life, madam."²⁰ Charlotte violently abuses Daisy, who is subsequently offered refuge by her

¹⁸ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 31.

¹⁹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 32.

²⁰ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 40.

(Pakeha) Auntie Maureen. One day, during this period of estrangement from Charlotte, Daisy sees her mother in the street. Charlotte is wearing “a black scarf and a dark coat look[ing] like one of the old Maori women who used to sit in the sun outside the Post Office.”²¹ It was one of these old Maori women who had stunned the teenaged-Daisy by asking her: “You Charlotte Porohiwi’s girl?”²² Up until that time Daisy Carter had not heard the name Porohiwi. This woman also warned Daisy to leave her grandson, Api, alone because she wanted him to learn “Pakeha ways.”²³ This Maori woman’s warning signifies Daisy’s raced-incontinence. The name, Porohiwi, which Daisy hears for the first time as a young adult, connotatively signifies as antecedent to the denotative signified, the British Empire as home. It takes Daisy over forty years to apprehend that Porohiwi also signifies connotatively in relationship to her own turangawaewae.

It is central to a Barthesian reading of the classic text that the symbolic code is linked “to the formulation of antitheses.”²⁴ Of these antitheses, or binary oppositions central to the organization of the cultural order, the most “dominant and sacrosanct ... is that between the male and female subjects.”²⁵ Barthes also suggests that in the classic deployment of the semic code, opposing elements are set “ritually face to face like fully armed warriors.”²⁶ In the classic text the

²¹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 178.

²² Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 179.

²³ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 179.

²⁴ Silverman 270.

²⁵ Silverman 270.

²⁶ Barthes, *S/Z* 27.

number of oppositions that can come into play at any one time is rigorously limited.

In the writerly text the symbolic code is disrupted by a repeated “passage through the wall of opposites.”²⁷ This writerly disruption of the symbolic order of the British Empire occurs in numerous signifying operations in relation to Uncle Auntie.²⁸ The pivotal role of the figure of Uncle Auntie in *Daisy and Lily* is noted by reviewer Cooper who describes Uncle Auntie as: “completely, utterly over the top, yet somehow stronger, wiser, more shrewd and sensible, more generous and supportive, than anyone else in Daisy’s life ... she is the central focus around whom the whole novel turns.”²⁹ Reviewer Payne regards Uncle Auntie as “the fulcrum for change.”³⁰ Reviewer Gillian Ranstead, describing Uncle Auntie as a “flagrant queen,”³¹ signals Uncle Auntie’s transgressive presence in a hetero-imperialist context.³²

²⁷ Barthes, *S/Z* 15. Silverman assesses that the disequivalence between sexual and symbolic differentiation is a “scandal” attributable to the failure of a number of other economies including that of representation” 272. In *S/Z*, Barthes argues that *Sarrasine* “represents the very confusion of representation, the unbridled (pandemic) circulation of signs, of sexes, of fortunes” 216.

²⁸ Silverman 240.

²⁹ Cooper 155-56.

³⁰ Payne 17.

³¹ Gillian Ranstead, “Daisy and Lily,” rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée. *Landfall* 186 (1993): 332.

³² Acceptance of transsexuality even in queer communities has only come lately. See notice given that “Auckland Lesbian and Gay Centre members voted to extend full rights to bisexuals and transpeople,” *Bi-lines* Dec. 1994: 3.

The pivotal role of the figure of Uncle Auntie is best revealed in the subversion of the semic code in conjunction with the symbolic code in the writerly text, *Daisy and Lily*. In the classic text the semic code “which functions to define character and place, relies upon the specificity of the proper name for its central term.”³³ It also operates in an overt fashion, “where the single quality by which a character is defined actually coincides with that character’s name.”³⁴ Duality, therefore, “is always implicit in the operations of the semic code since the attributes it clusters round a proper name derive their value from opposing ones.”³⁵ An anonymous reviewer, who describes Uncle Auntie as “a man but also a woman,”³⁶ signals how, via the writerly deployment of the semic code, “Uncle Auntie” disrupts the economy of language by linking two conflicting nominations, Uncle and Auntie.

Barthes argues:

Far from differing merely by the presence of lack of a simple relationship (as is ordinarily the case with paradigmatic opposites), the two terms of an antithesis are each *marked*: their difference does not arise out of a complementary, dialectical movement (empty as opposed to full) ... the

³³ Silverman 250.

³⁴ Silverman 253. Silverman points out that the semic code operates “by grouping a number of signifiers around either a proper name, or another signifier which functions temporarily as if it were a proper name” 251. Silverman offers the example of *Everyman*, 253.

³⁵ Silverman 276.

³⁶ “Death and love are major themes” 23.

antithesis is the figure of the *given* opposition, eternal, eternally recurrent:
the figure of the inexpiable.³⁷

In the classic text this principle of the separation of opposites also applies to the economy of the body: “its parts cannot be interchanged, the sexes cannot be equivalent.”³⁸ The queer constitution of Uncle Auntie’s transsexed body, therefore, illustrates the “transgression of the Antithesis.”³⁹ In the writerly deployment of the semic code in conjunction the symbolic code in *Daisy and Lily*, a range of “radical transformations ... are registered within the larger cultural order when sexual difference is belied” via the figure of Uncle Auntie.⁴⁰

Daisy describes her first ever sighting of Uncle Auntie: “There she stood, resplendent in jet black, froth of white lace at the neck. She wore black stockings, high-heeled black patent leather shoes and on her head was a large black picture hat with huge red velvet roses rioting across the rim.”⁴¹ Daisy sees Uncle Auntie’s cross-gendered appearance, or drag, as a kind of impersonation. Judith Butler argues that drag,

implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation
there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but *gender is a*

³⁷ Barthes, *S/Z* 27.

³⁸ Barthes, *S/Z* 215.

³⁹ Barthes, *S/Z* 215.

⁴⁰ Silverman 272.

⁴¹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 67.

*kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself.*⁴²

In the writerly text, *Daisy and Lily*, one such gendered “imitation” is ironically signified in the figure of Daisy’s and Lily’s next-door neighbour, Doris, who “with her cuban heels, her liking for blue floral dresses and white cardies, triple-string and clip-on fake pearls,” considers that she “had never met anyone like Uncle Auntie in her entire life.”⁴³

None of the symbolic privileges—usually afforded to the male subject—are afforded to the transsexed figure of Uncle Auntie.⁴⁴ She is, furthermore, subjected to violent sanctions for her gender-sexed-sexualised misappropriations. For example, “a bunch of drunken rugby fans on their way home from watching their team lose decided to do over the pretty boy who insisted on carrying a handbag.”⁴⁵ The violence perpetrated against Uncle Auntie for her multiply signified transgression is linked with a more general symbolic and cultural violence against women. In her young adulthood Daisy declares that she likes clothes that are “nice Quiet.

⁴² Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” Fuss 21.

⁴³ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 71.

⁴⁴ Silverman points out that in *Sarrasine*, Balzac’s “writerly experiment” read by Barthes in *S/Z*, “the symbolic field always exceeds biological difference ... the phallus designates a cluster of privileges which are as fully capable of finding their locus in a female subject as in a male” 270-271. In *Daisy and Lily* none of the privileges which would normally find their locus in the male subject are afforded to Uncle Auntie.

⁴⁵ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 23.

Respectable.”⁴⁶ Uncle Auntie reads a certain failure into Daisy’s adolescent attempts at hetero-respectability. She offers Daisy the benefit of her own hindsight: “Dressing yourself up in clothes that’d look better on your Auntie Maureen here’s not going to stop awful things happening. It just means you’re the one doing it to yourself. You think about that.”⁴⁷ Awful things do happen to Daisy.

In *Daisy and Lily* a legitimating eros for the colonialist nation is connotatively signified in relationship to the symbolic and cultural codes of raced-hetero-respectability. In the colonialist text a lesbian sexuality is, therefore, signified as transgressive. Daisy recalls the moment of her first sexual encounter with Lily:

[She] danced me around the Sanson sitting room until we fell onto the couch laughing hysterically ... Lily’s face was very close to mine. We stopped and looked at each other. Lily frowned a little. “Daisy,” she said, then stopped, shook her head ... I felt strange. And the strangeness was located between my legs. A tingle like what happened sometimes when I’d just finished my periods. I blinked, Lily moved, and the edginess, if that’s what it was, ended. “Jesus,” said Lily and her frown deepened.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 68.

⁴⁷ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 70.

⁴⁸ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 98.

In the absence of a positive discourse of lesbian sexuality,⁴⁹ Daisy's sexual response is signified by the feeling of "strangeness." Sometime later Daisy contemplates that sexual encounter with Lily: "Oh yes, I'd said then, oh yes yes, but that was a mistake, dirty, we must've been drunk, and I didn't want to think about that."⁵⁰ Unable to articulate a non-transgressive discourse of lesbian desire, Daisy reverts to a discourse of self-blame and personal failure: "It must be my fault."⁵¹ Daisy reconsiders that the "dirty" mistake "was all Lily's fault, she'd made me drink Auntie Maureen's sherry."⁵² Later, Daisy asks herself more self-searching questions: "When did I start to want Lily? When did Lily start to want me?"⁵³ Still unable to reconcile herself to her inexplicable sexuality, Daisy thinks her mistake might be something that runs in her family: "Look at Charlotte. Look at Uncle Auntie."⁵⁴ Although Daisy and Lily suppress and deny their love for each other for forty years, Daisy reflects: "I knew one day I'd have to find out what all the fuss was about."⁵⁵

In the interim, Daisy seeks out information about sexuality. Her inquiry is hampered by a climate of surveillance. Even then she finds only the classic texts:

⁴⁹ Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993) argues that where direct sexual representations are not permissible "sexual speech is forced into reticence, euphemism, and indirection" 19.

⁵⁰ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 105.

⁵¹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 97.

⁵² Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 109.

⁵³ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 97.

⁵⁴ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 97.

⁵⁵ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 98.

“I could have got *Married Love* off the library shelf but to do so would mean I’d have to face Miss Barnes, the Librarian, and Miss Barnes would know that I, Daisy Carter, a single girl, was delving into things not meant for her eyes.”⁵⁶ That even a classic text such as *Married Love* was “not meant for her eyes” gives credence to Daisy’s sense of failure and self-blame in another youthful sexual encounter, this time with a boy. She recalls: “I fought a silent struggle with him in the back seat until he had me pinned on his knee. Really frightened, I told him loudly to stop. ‘Bloody cock-teaser,’ he said.”⁵⁷ Not only does Daisy have to struggle with her own ignorance, she also knows she is to blame. The female colonialist subject is always already sexed-incontinent.

Lily also seeks refuge from the threat posed by her lesbian sexuality. She does so in a retreat to heterosexuality. When Lily gets married Daisy is distraught but feels that she couldn’t say anything:

What was there to say? Only the unspeakable and I couldn’t say that even to myself, let alone Lily. I can make excuses and say that we were products of our time and that’s true, but when I think of what we’ve wasted simply on the basis of some irrational ingrained convention, I could scream.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 98-99.

⁵⁷ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 99.

⁵⁸ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 100.

The “unspeakable” connotatively signifies how a colonialist discourse of compulsory hetero-sexuality and hetero-propriety operates to keep Daisy and Lily apart.

In the intervening years, Daisy continues to pursue a hetero-colonialist respectability in the context of her domestic life with her husband Spenser. The writerly text, *Daisy and Lily*, rereads hetero-colonialist respectability and the legitimating eros of the colonialist nation as classed-bourgeois and raced-white. Daisy explains why she married Spenser:

I wanted a nice house. A husband with a decent job. Spenser didn't drink. I didn't want a husband who drank He'd passed his [accountancy] exams and got a job at Charles and Linwood, the big accountants in Napier who were prepared to encourage him in his ambitions by allowing him time off for exams. All very respectable.⁵⁹

Daisy's explanation for marrying Spenser includes the fact he “didn't mind about me being dark.”⁶⁰ She asks him: “Why don't you mind?” Daisy realises that he “really didn't see that it mattered.”⁶¹ Daisy's gratitude for the respectability Spenser offered her can be reread as an internalised racism signified in relationship to a British cultural superiority implicitly raced-white. My reading of

⁵⁹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 96-97.

⁶⁰ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 96.

⁶¹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 121.

this inscription into the writerly text, *Daisy and Lily*, is further supported by the following remarks made by Spenser when he mimics the patronising attitude of his boss, Mr Linwood:

I had a few qualms, I'm the first to admit it, when I knew Spenser was going to marry Daisy Carter, nice enough girl but a bit of the pa there ... but it's all turned out most satisfactorily. She's a good housekeeper and cooks a lovely roast meal.⁶²

In his reported remark, "a bit of the pa there," Mr Linwood implicitly signifies Daisy's raced-cultural inferiority. Daisy's respectability is, however, "satisfactorily" reconstituted via her "good" housekeeping, signified by her "lovely roast meal." At the time, Daisy considered that Spenser not minding that she is Maori "was less hurtful ... than the overt condescension of Mr Linwood, [but she] came to see that it was just another way of avoiding the issue. Of course it mattered."⁶³ Daisy signifies an emerging consciousness that an internalised racism materialises her own denial as one of its effects. Daisy's emerging awareness of a discourse of race is signified in relation to a racist conversation which she overhears:

⁶² Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 120.

⁶³ Daisy's recollections coincide with a discourse on race developed by Maori women and published in, for example, *Bitches, Witches and Dykes: a women's liberation newspaper* which included a "Black Forum" as a separate political entity with articles by, for and about Black women, specifically for the development of Black Feminist theory.

Donnie told Spenser that the New Zealand Rugby Union's decision to exclude Maori players from the team to tour South Africa was for the Maori's own good and they would still have their own special rugby tours I couldn't understand why any self-respecting Maori would want to go. It was years before I wondered why the hell anyone, Maori or Pakeha, would want to go to such a place.⁶⁴

What is signified as a paternalistic protectionism, "for the Maori's own good," signifies an implicit approval of racist apartheid, "their own special rugby tours." In the process of discerning a reason as to "why self-respecting Maori would want to go," Daisy retraces the history of own self-effacement. She recalls that for a long time:

I didn't see myself as Maori though. I didn't see myself as Pakeha. If I met Maori eyes on a bus or walking along a street I thought of them as they, not us, and felt as awkward if they sat beside me at the pictures or on the bus as I did with everyone else except Lily and Roland.⁶⁵

At that time, Daisy accepted that "whatever part of me I turned to was always going to be alien."⁶⁶ She tells herself "you're too light for some and too dark for others."⁶⁷ Daisy's feeling of alienation is traced to the explanation for her dark

⁶⁴ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 126.

⁶⁵ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 126.

⁶⁶ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 157.

⁶⁷ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 158.

skin given to her by Charlotte: “Maori? There was no Maori in her family thank you very much. Her grandmother had married a Spanish sailor, that’s where the dark skin came from.”⁶⁸ Daisy recalls that certain people “disapproved of me on the basis of my skin.”⁶⁹ She thinks “maybe that was my paranoia.”⁷⁰ Daisy also remembers that her mother-in-law was happy to go along with the theory of Daisy’s Spanish ancestry: “to make sure everyone knew her grandson wasn’t Maori.”⁷¹

During the period in her life when she is still married to Spenser, Daisy is forced to consider that, even though she has suppressed her lesbian sexuality, she remains in danger of being rediscovered. Daisy’s fears are articulated in the context of the Parker-Hulme murder which shocked New Zealanders in the 1950’s. She recounts her feelings:

[A]long with the rest of the country, I was horrified to read about a couple of Christchurch schoolgirls murdering the mother of one of them. When the first headlines broke the sensational details I could hardly bear to read the following reports. I was sure that if I showed any interest at all my love for Lily ... would be plain for all to see. I bought copies of *Truth* and read them surreptitiously when Spenser was at work. Apparently the whole

⁶⁸ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 30. See Sally Morgan, *My Place* (Fremantle, W.A.: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987) who relates that this was an explanation given to account for her own skin colour.

⁶⁹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 57.

⁷⁰ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 57.

⁷¹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 120.

bizarre mess was due to the abnormal relationship which had developed between them. That was the crux of it.⁷²

Daisy fears that if she shows an interest in the case parallels will be drawn between the “abnormal relationship” of the Christchurch schoolgirls Juliet Hulme and Pauline Parker, and her own relationship with Lily.⁷³ A parallel is drawn in the writerly text, *Daisy and Lily*, between the detailed diaries which Hulme and Parker had kept—and which were used in evidence against them—and Daisy’s own journals. In a writerly reiteration of the wariness with which Daisy has approached what has already been “written down,”⁷⁴ Daisy rereads her own journals “pretending I was a stranger picking them up for the first time.”⁷⁵ Though there is little of what might constitute such evidence in her journals, Daisy fears her own dark secret will be plain for all to see if she is not constantly vigilant in concealing herself.

Renée also explores connections between what has been “written down” in the classic texts of the British Empire and its manifestation as a colonialist cultural aesthetic operating in the colonialist nation New Zealand. This textual effect of

⁷² Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 119.

⁷³ See Glamuzina and Laurie, *Parker and Hulme: A Lesbian View* which is a non-fiction account of a murder case involving two New Zealand schoolgirls. Glamuzina and Laurie offer a lesbian perspective on the murder and on the sensation created by the national and international media which associated lesbianism with evil, insanity and murder. This story is also told in Peter Jackson’s Oscar-winning film *Heavenly Creatures* (Wingnut Productions, 1994).

⁷⁴ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 15-16. In *S/Z*, Barthes asserts that the “reality” of cultural codes can found in the “handbooks” of a classical bourgeois educational system, 205-6.

⁷⁵ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 120.

British cultural imperialism is explored, in part, via the cultural activities of Daisy's husband Spenser. Spenser is an accountant by day, and a director of the Hills Players theatre group by night. He is described by his friends and admirers as a "creative, sensitive, stylish director."⁷⁶ To his enemies and detractors he is "a lousy empire-building egotistical shit."⁷⁷

Spenser's colonialist cultural "empire-building" is signified in his preference "to do seasons of the classics, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Shaw, Chekov."⁷⁸ Spenser "was prepared to do New Zealand scripts as long as the scripts were up to scratch. What that meant only Spenser knew and it's true he did very few New Zealand plays."⁷⁹ "Scratch" and "the classics" signify as metaphors for an imperialist cultural aesthetic, measured against which "New Zealand plays" would, by definition, rarely qualify. One such so-called New Zealand play qualifies on grounds that it "speaks with a clarity and precision which will appeal to everyone."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 57. Dorothy Allison, *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class and Literature*. New York: Firebrand Books, 1994 argues: "Everything in our [American] culture—books, television, movies, school, fashion—is presented as if it is being seen by one pair of eyes, shaped by one set of hands, heard by one pair of ears" 16. Allison asserts: "I am what I have read "I am the wages of pulp" 94.

⁷⁷ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 57.

⁷⁸ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 130.

⁷⁹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 130.

⁸⁰ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 141. The increasing popularity of theatre as a postcolonial performing art and as an increasingly popular genre of postcolonial literary studies is discussed by Linda Hutcheon, "Introduction. Complexities Abounding," *PMLA* 110 (1995): 7-16. See also Brian Crow and Chris Banfield, *An introduction to post-colonial theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

The life and death consequences of violating hetero-imperialist sexual codes are connotatively signified in *Daisy and Lily*, in the context of a lesbian affair between Colleen Harvey, wife of the Treasurer of the Hills Players theatre group, and Shirley the wife of the local vicar. The vicar labels his wife a “scarlet woman.”⁸¹ Daisy reflects on her earlier awareness that when men “strayed with other women at least that was natural [whereas what Colleen and Shirley] had got up to was different.”⁸² In Daisy’s eyes the “terrible thing was that [they] didn’t seem to comprehend the enormity of what they’d done.”⁸³ Shirley died a week later having “swallowed half a dozen sleeping pills and then put her head in a plastic bag.”⁸⁴ Daisy comments that people had thought that Shirley “had done the right thing.”⁸⁵ A transgressive (read: incontinent) lesbian sexuality is signified as a matter of life and death in a hetero-imperialist sexual economy.

The implied respectability and refuge of the hetero-colonialist home is again contested in the writerly text when Daisy discovers that her teenaged neighbour, Brenda Kelly, is being sexually abused by her own father. In an expression of her emergent feminist consciousness, Daisy confronts Spenser when he resists her intervention: “it’s not her fault and if she goes I go.”⁸⁶ Daisy signifies her primary commitment to women, in general, and not to Spenser, in particular. Part of her

⁸¹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 73.

⁸² Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 73.

⁸³ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 73.

⁸⁴ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 74.

⁸⁵ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 74.

⁸⁶ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 47.

journey from self-hatred to self-respect, therefore, includes Daisy's decision to leave Spenser.

In her reflections, Daisy finds it "hard to accept that I once saw Spenser as an escape from Lily, or more accurately my feelings for Lily. I was in love and I was running scared."⁸⁷ Daisy faces the consequences of her choice to marry him when she insists "it was my doing. So I'd have to make the best of it."⁸⁸ Making "the best of it" in colonialist symbolic economy of hetero-respectability, predicated on an institutionalised and internalised racism and homophobia, includes Daisy blaming herself. Daisy comments on the feelings she experiences when she breaks away from the restrictions of hetero-white respectability when she does leave Spenser: "I'd read about slaves who couldn't cope with freedom because they preferred the familiarity of shackles and I knew how they felt."⁸⁹ In breaking out of hetero-colonialist respectability, Daisy declares: "When I left, I left everything."⁹⁰ In this context "everything" connotatively signifies a British imperialist symbolic and cultural economy.

After Daisy leaves Spenser she finds work at "The Haven," a women's refuge.⁹¹ In a writerly rereading of the colonialist text of home-as-refuge, Daisy reflects on

⁸⁷ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 96-97.

⁸⁸ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 107.

⁸⁹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 84.

⁹⁰ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 172.

⁹¹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 146. Maori women were involved in the New Zealand women's refuge movement from its inception. See "Black Dykes Hui," *Circle* 37 (1981): 12. See also "Te Kakano O Te Whanau Ki Tamaki," *Lesbians In Print: Wahine Maori* Oketopa/Noema 1988: 27, which is a

her earlier ideas about domestic violence: “There had always been men who’d beaten their wives. I knew that. Everyone knew that. It was not the sort of thing you interfered with. Men got drunk and went too far.”⁹² Daisy’s work at The Haven helps to clarify her perspective on institutionalised violence in a colonialist-nationalist context. When she expresses her anger at how long it takes the police to respond to a woman’s call for urgent help, Uncle Auntie offers her perspective on their tardiness: “They don’t like Domestics.”⁹³ Uncle Auntie articulates the symbolic order of the British Empire reproduced in the hetero-colonialist family home-away-from-home, by signifying the reluctance of the police force to interfere in the institutionalised (read: domestic) role of the husband.

The protection afforded to men, in general, in a colonialist nation state is again signified by a Maori woman who has sought refuge for herself and her children at the Haven. She had called the police to stop her husband beating their son and was furious at their reluctance to help: “Bloody shits You’ll drag innocent people off their own land but you won’t do a thing about a grown man belting up a kid!” Maria, who works at The Haven, adds: “My auntie was bloody dragged off Bastion Point.”⁹⁴ The writerly text, *Daisy and Lily*, signifies both a man’s privilege and the protection afforded him in the colonialist nation New Zealand.

report on a national organisation of Maori women who work with Maori women and children who have suffered from sexual abuse, rape, incest and related violence.

⁹² Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 146.

⁹³ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 146.

⁹⁴ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 147.

At this point in Daisy's life Colleen Harvey turns up. She comes into the fish and chip shop where Daisy is working.⁹⁵ Daisy is immediately alert to signs of Colleen's lesbian sexuality:

She was in black trousers and a black shirt with a white tie and a white sombrero-type hat. There was a style about her that I'd noticed on some of the women who came into the shop. An air. Nothing tangible, although in its own way obvious.⁹⁶

This meeting with Colleen brings Daisy into contact with a lesbian community.

Daisy remarks:

It felt like a community even though I came to see there were huge differences amongst groups of women. First of all I had to learn the terminology. "There are dykes and gay women ... which means feminist and non-feminist lesbians." [Colleen] said I'd meet all shades of political opinion so the best thing to do was to keep my mouth shut until I knew who I was talking to, "and even then you'll have to be careful."⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 74.

⁹⁶ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 75.

⁹⁷ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 80. See *Hera 2* (1979) which addresses "lesbians:—closeted lesbians; isolated lesbians; up-front lesbians; role-playing lesbians; christian lesbians; lesbian couples; womin who don't even realise they are lesbians" 1.

Daisy reads certain haircuts and dress codes as signifying membership in a lesbian community. In the process of constructing her own lesbian identity, Daisy is attracted to the queer looks of the “diesel dykes [but] didn’t have anything to wear. No trousers or slacks, as I would have called them ... a blue cotton divided skirt ... [I] asked if that would do ... I fell in love with the dyke look, the casual nature of it, the ease.”⁹⁸

Daisy is not only alert to what might signify a respectable “dyke look,” she is also alert to what might constitute a legitimating eros for lesbian nation. For example, at the K.G. club Daisy saw “women hugging and kissing quite openly. I tried not to be too obvious but I know I must have goggled.”⁹⁹ Daisy’s contact with a sexually diverse community leads her to accept that a range of queer sexualities are constitutive of that community’s legitimating eros. She explains:

Some feminist saw queens as reinforcing the worst of the “feminine” excesses they spent their lives protesting about, but Colleen and Connie weren’t like that. In any case, as Colleen reminded me ... she was an old hand at going against the tide.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 79. The term “diesel dykes” applied to women whose appearance in the gay bar scene in the 1950s and 1960s was characterized by a working-class, masculine appearance. Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky, and Madeline D. Davis. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

⁹⁹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 79.

¹⁰⁰ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 72.

At the same time as Daisy reads a legitimating eros for the lesbian community, she is also aware of the political tensions underlying this community. For example, she met,

women who'd lived together for twenty years in a brick-and-tile three-bedroom house in Mt Albert and didn't want these young pushy dykes coming along and making waves, spoiling the lives they'd so carefully (and painfully) built up. It was some of these same young dykes who jeered at monogamous relationships, at the stereotypical butch and femme roles so loved by some of the older diesel dykes. Between these two extremes was a mass of women who had come to Auckland to get away from the small towns, the families, the psychiatric wards, the gaols, the living of lies. There were married women, divorced women, women who'd never been with a man and women who made their living as prostitutes. I met them all at the Club over the next ten years until its time ran out and it folded.¹⁰¹

Her reference to the mass of women who had come to Auckland illustrates Daisy's understanding that the lesbian community with which she is forming a relationship is constituted, in part, by a lesbian diaspora, forced through the pressures and hardships of homophobic discrimination to move away from family

¹⁰¹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 80-81. Weston refers to "a wave of lesbian and gay immigrants," in the Bay area of San Francisco during the 1970s, 8.

homes and workplaces where psychic and physical violence are amongst factors contributing to the growing numbers of homeless lesbians.¹⁰²

Daisy's experiences, in lesbian and feminist cultural and political communities in New Zealand in the 1970s and 1980s, contribute to her awareness of a postcolonial cultural politics operating in opposition to the cultural politics of the colonialist nation. She remembers "a woman at The Haven telling me that before they were married her husband made her promise she'd never read a book in the daytime. Reading was a waste of time. A woman who had time to read in the daytime was neglecting her wifely duties."¹⁰³ The importance of gaining access to a feminist literature is spelled out by Daisy in her estimation of its impact on women's lives:

Just about every second woman I've met in the last sixteen years has some experience connected with a person or a book, a play or a painting, about which they say with perfect conviction and truth, "This changed my life." It's become a feminist cliché but only because there's a basic truth to it.¹⁰⁴

Daisy pays her own tribute to writers who challenged a partisan literary aesthetic when she visits the graves of Colette, Gertrude Stein, Oscar Wilde, Katherine

¹⁰² Reporter Victoria Brownworth, "No Place Like Home For The Holidays," *Deneuve* 4.6 (1994) estimates that there are three million lesbian and gay homeless in America. Amongst these are "[w]omen jettisoned from straight marriages, gay men dumped by wealthy lovers, teenagers thrown out of their homes by homophobic parents, queers who have lost their jobs to homophobia, lesbian alcoholics, gay male drug addicts, [and] women and men with AIDS" 70. Weston also refers to "the precarious economic and legal position of people who come out while still minors" 80.

¹⁰³ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 110.

¹⁰⁴ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 144.

Mansfield, and Aphra Behn, when she is on an overseas holiday.¹⁰⁵ She also draws attention to the feminist writers Adrienne Rich, Jill Johnston, and Kate Millett.¹⁰⁶ A postcolonial lesbian feminist cultural politics operating in the wider postcolonial nation is signified on a number of dimensions:

It might be the United Women's Convention in 1975,¹⁰⁷ or a simple discussion when stuffing *Broadsheet* one Saturday. It might have been the big split in '78 ... when a bunch of dykes confronted the *Broadsheet* collective over alleged homophobia.¹⁰⁸ For lots of women it was events around the Springbok Tour of 1981.¹⁰⁹

The power of the colonialist (read: anti-feminist) media to politically influence public opinion via their choice of representations is also shown in what Daisy reads as maliciously chosen “[p]hotographs of a group of women protesting ... [with] open mouths, strained necks and raised arms.”¹¹⁰ From Daisy's perspective, the dissemination of such representations is clearly intended to advance an anti-feminist cause:

¹⁰⁵ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 92-94.

¹⁰⁶ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 184.

¹⁰⁷ United Women's Conventions, forums for the discussion and development of second-wave feminism, were held in New Zealand in the 1970s. The last one was held in 1979.

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter Three for commentary of the role of *Broadsheet* in New Zealand feminist cultural production.

¹⁰⁹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 144.

¹¹⁰ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 76.

I had read about feminism years before in *Testament of Youth* but I hadn't known feminists were alive and well in New Zealand before 1972 when Women's Liberation, suddenly it seemed, bloomed and blossomed. There were all sorts of outrageous headlines in the paper. Feminists were burning bras, hated men, were strident, unattractive and—horror of horrors—had attempted to liberate some public bars, of all things.¹¹¹

Daisy also reflects on the power of the media to advance an anti-racist cause in its representation of protests against the South African rugby tour of 1981. She recalls seeing the anti-racist protest group Artists Against Apartheid “with huge flags and French bread batons, bags of sweets, some clowns, a bumble bee and a rabbit,”¹¹² chanting to the TV cameras “the whole world is watching never again, no tour, never again, no tour.”¹¹³

A writerly reading of the policed-nature of the imperialist (read: racist) nation state, during the South African rugby tour of 1981, is given when Daisy recalls:

My mind was never free of batons and shields, of barbed wire, big bins, of angry eyes, of beer crates carried high on the shoulders of rugby supporters, of newspaper and TV interviews with sincere, quiet-voiced

¹¹¹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 76.

¹¹² Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 161-62.

¹¹³ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 162.

cops talking about professional protesters, of Muldoon with a balloon coming out of his mouth with law and order written on it.¹¹⁴

1981 was a landmark year in Aotearoa New Zealand for the history of organised opposition against apartheid in South Africa. During this time Daisy moved in a daze: “Fear of the police never left me.”¹¹⁵ But it is not just the police that Daisy justifiably fears as a threat to her and to her wider queer, mixed-race community. A Pakeha sports fan who is enraged that the game he came to see is being disrupted calls out to Daisy: “Fucking black cunt.”¹¹⁶ This sports fan’s public expression of misogynist racism aptly signifies Daisy’s discursive location in the colonialist nation New Zealand, albeit at the time, a nation in crisis.

Daisy signals an emerging discourse of cultural misappropriation when her newly found political enthusiasm is dampened by negative attitudes associated with her identifying as Maori at a time that was regarded by some Maori and Pakeha as politically expedient. Daisy articulates her understanding of the complexities of this problem with which she is faced:

After 1981 I didn’t want to be seen as getting in on the act. Suddenly finding my Maoritanga, racing off to weekends on a marae feeling outside, outside, outside I know, none better how bloody painfully

¹¹⁴ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 159. Robert Muldoon was Prime Minister and leader of the National Party between 1976 and 1984. His support of the 1981 Springbok Tour on the issue of law and order was a source of conflict and division throughout New Zealand.

¹¹⁵ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 160.

¹¹⁶ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 163.

difficult it is to find your way back to the very place you'd been taught to be ashamed of, to keep very quiet about or you'll get something to make a song and dance about, my girl.¹¹⁷

When Daisy signifies her position as “outside, outside, outside,” her identity as an ageing, part-Maori, lesbian “trying to find [her] way back to the very place [she'd] been taught to be ashamed of,” constitutes for her a three-way, compound problem. Her worst fears are realised when she seeks help with a translation and is rebuffed as a Pakeha “help[ing] themselves to the language.”¹¹⁸ Daisy does not have access to a Maori community. She tells Jaynetta—a Maori transsexual queen and a friend of Uncle Auntie—that she only ever knew one Maori until she met Uncle Auntie “and that was my mother.”¹¹⁹ Jaynetta responds by articulating her own diasporic experience as a Maori and a queen (read: queer) living apart from her tribal land and whanau:

Apart from queens I don't have much to do with Maoris in the city I want to but the ones I talked to thought I was funny. You can always tell, can't you. So different to the Coast. I thought they were all standoffish like that until I met Magda. I miss the Coast.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 157.

¹¹⁸ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 157.

¹¹⁹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 157. New Zealand lesbian periodicals played an important role in breaking down the isolation experienced by Maori lesbians. See, for example, “Wahine Maori friendship and support group,” *Taranaki Lesbian Newsletter* Apr. 1993: 5.

¹²⁰ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 156-57.

On the one hand, the city offers Jaynetta a mixed-race, queer community. On the other hand, the Coast signifies as the turangawaewae of home, family, and land for which Jaynetta longs.

Another challenge to an imperialist discourse of authenticity occurs in the context of the 1953 meeting between Queen Elizabeth II and King Koroki at the Turangawaewae marae:

Beryl and Bob talked about the Queen breaking with tradition and meeting King Koroki at Turangawaewae and whether this was right or not. I gathered from overheard bits of conversation in the library and in the grocer's ... it was not a popular move. "They could get above themselves. And everyone knows its just Waikato. The other tribes don't call him King."¹²¹

Turangawaewae is the marae officially associated with Tainui royalty. King Koroki was the paramount chief of the Tainui tribal grouping and Arikiniui, or "King," of a Tainui-centered confederation of central North Island tribes.¹²² The possibility of reading this meeting, between King Koroki of Turangawaewae and Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, as a public display of raced-symmetry is speedily expropriated by the Pakeha commentator who insists, "other tribes don't call him King." Here, a colonialist discourse reconstitutes an authentic British

¹²¹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 118-19.

¹²² The Maori King movement is also known as Kingitanga.

imperialist royalty.¹²³ The other Pakeha commentator's denigrating remark, that Maori "could get above themselves," also reinstates the imperialist (read: cultural) order of British Queen over Maori King.

The writerly text "corrupts the purity of [imperialist] communication."¹²⁴ This is achieved in a writerly deployment of the connotative potential of the signifier "queen" in the context of Spenser's funeral. Here, Uncle Auntie's regal imitation of the Queen Mother can be reread as a textual act of anti-imperialist subversion:

It was then Uncle Auntie made her entrance. She wore her latest ensemble, a bright violet suit and hat to match with a burnt orange frilly blouse and high-heeled shoes to match ... She'd read somewhere that mauves and violets were kinder to one's complexion as one got older. "That's why the Queen Mother wears them so often." ... She lifted a mauve-gloved hand in a Queen Mother salute towards the coffin.¹²⁵

Here, the juxtapositioning of queen mothers challenges notions of originality and authenticity. In this writerly deployment of the antithesis, Uncle Auntie manifests her so-called difference from the so-called original. Her performance makes manifest that there are Queens and queens, the privileged and the non-privileged. In this signifying process the inherent instability of the identity category "queen"

¹²³ See "Oppose the Royal Tour," *Dyke News* Apr. 1983: 2-3. This was a call for New Zealand lesbians to protest against the neocolonialist implications of the 1983 British Royal Tour.

¹²⁴ Barthes *S/Z* 9.

¹²⁵ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 60.

is illustrated. In a postcolonial imitation of a queen, for which there is no original, Uncle Auntie rereads and performs her colonialist subjectivity already sexed-gendered-sexualised-raced as female-feminine-homo-black.

Uncle Auntie articulates her value in an imperialist symbolic economy: “Queens, unless you’re the Queen Mother of course, usually die young. It’s all the cutting about and the pills. And the booze. And the white stuff. And the men we fall in love with.”¹²⁶ The writerly potential inherent in the antithesis is deployed again when Daisy asks Uncle Auntie: “How do you see yourself? ... Maori or not Maori?”¹²⁷ Uncle Auntie replies, “I’m a queen ... that’s how I see myself.”¹²⁸ Uncle Auntie knows that there is no real escape from the systemic sexual violence inherent in the symbolic order of the British Empire.

Uncle Auntie recalls her earlier notion that there may have been an effective strategy for dealing with this reality: “I thought I might as well come to the city and get paid for it.”¹²⁹ In the city Uncle Auntie is a queen mother in kinship network of transsexual queens. Weston argues that in the stereotyped “tragedy of ‘gay life’ [these kind of people] are popularly supposed to incarnate [the] most

¹²⁶ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 19.

¹²⁷ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 165.

¹²⁸ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 165. Edmund White, *The Burning Library: Writings on Art, Politics and Sexuality 1969-1993* (London: Picador, 1994) suggests that in homosexual vocabulary, “Queen is almost certainly derived from *quean* (the Elizabethan word for prostitute)” 72.

¹²⁹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 23.

sexual and least social of beings.”¹³⁰ Uncle Auntie is afforded, and provides companionship and protection within this community.

Contingencies of value in an imperialist symbolic economy are elaborated in the city where, as an ageing Maori queen, Magda Porohiwi faces multiple discriminations against her transsexed-raced body. She recognises that she has no white place in which to hide and is reconciled to her raced-place in this economy: “Us Porohiwis, we can bear anything. We’ve had lots of practice.”¹³¹ Her community cannot offer her ultimate protection in an overarching imperialist symbolic economy. She is battered to death for \$1200 gleaned in a garage sale of stolen goods.

Uncle Auntie’s value in a hetero-imperialist sexual economy is also articulated by Daisy when she recalls the response of the police to Uncle Auntie’s murder:

The police were doing their best but there’d been a terrible shooting at a petrol station and they were very stretched until the extras that were on their way arrived. They’d looked at the black balaclava found under Uncle Auntie’s body, taken prints from the poker, and they’d questioned Jaynetta about her movements the night before. But one old queen being beaten and left for dead hardly rated.¹³²

¹³⁰ Weston 2.

¹³¹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 82.

¹³² Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 8-9.

Daisy “put [her own] warm hand over Uncle Auntie’s cold one ... The nails were long and painted red but the skin was wrinkled and brown-spotted, an old lady’s hand.”¹³³ Daisy articulates how, alive or dead, Uncle Auntie, female-feminine-homo-proletariat-black, “hardly rated” in this symbolic economy: “Some bastard had beaten her up for the money. That’s what her life had been worth. A lousy twelve hundred dollars.”¹³⁴

In an imperialist capitalist economy respectability is classed-bourgeois. Daisy understands that an impoverished class is, therefore, signified as unrespectable. She speaks of benefit cuts, food banks, and under-the-counter/black market money.¹³⁵ Her sense of economic justice and survival in a capitalist, bourgeois economy leads her to believe:

You either hustle some extra money or get it in the form of food or clothing from the food bank. Either way avoids tax. And what’s wrong with that? The big corporations pay smart accountants a fortune to do the same. It seems to me there’s a bit more self-reliance as well as self-respect in the make-up of hustlers but maybe that’s because I’m one.¹³⁶

¹³³ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 9.

¹³⁴ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 8.

¹³⁵ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 170-73.

¹³⁶ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 171.

When Daisy and Lily are driving the deceased Uncle Auntie home to Wairoa in her coffin, and are listening to the car radio they hear how: “Groups of unemployed ... shouted and surged forward and had to be restrained by the police.”¹³⁷ Daisy considers that in the delivery of this news “the reporter sounded as though she was talking about a sub-human species.”¹³⁸ Daisy hears an unemployed sub-humanity signified via a discourse of personal failing. She explains the consequences: “Being poor’s like all the other things where the victims blame themselves. You have no control. You feel an overpowering sense of shame and anger, that much stronger for being repressed.”¹³⁹

In the context of an Auckland lesbian community a legitimating eros for older dykes couples in the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand is signified first, via a lesbian couple who had lived together for forty years. This couple, Lila and Dulcie,

visited the club one night as guests of a group of women who played cards with them. They were celebrating the anniversary of their meeting. Lila and Dulcie. The young dykes couldn’t do enough for them, even the ones who sneered at long-term lesbian relationships on the grounds they were

¹³⁷ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 187.

¹³⁸ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 187.

¹³⁹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 26.

aping the institutions of the heterosexual community. Maybe even the baby dykes saw something to admire in these two old women.¹⁴⁰

Compared to Lila and Dulcie who have been together for forty years, Daisy and Lily have just been reunited after forty years apart. Their reunion is complicated and painful. Lily explains what has happened to her in the interim:

I was just walking along ... minding my own business but that's how it happens, eh. And these two creeps grabbed me They did all the usual things. And when they'd finished they thought I was dead so they buried me under some leaves and dirt they heaped up. By the time I scratched my way out I was in a pretty bad way.¹⁴¹

Lily explains that this is why she cannot give sexual expression to her love for Daisy: "I got done and everything changed."¹⁴² I can't touch people, not any more."¹⁴³ Lily knows that her rape was not an isolated incident: "Women have never been safe out jogging."¹⁴⁴ Daisy explains Lily's personal adjustment: "Lily discovered she could manage as long as she wore gloves and never allowed

¹⁴⁰ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 81. New Zealand lesbian communities have organised support groups for older lesbians. See, for example, "Over 50s 'Crones' group," *Taranaki Lesbian Newsletter* Oct. 1994: 5. See also a calendar of events for the lesbian group "POLLY: (proud older lesbians like you)," *Tamaki Makaurau Lesbian Newsletter* Dec. 1994-Jan. 1995: 8.

¹⁴¹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 90.

¹⁴² Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 51.

¹⁴³ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 90.

¹⁴⁴ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 63.

another person to touch her.”¹⁴⁵ Daisy’s work at The Haven has helped her understand that rape is a fact of the colonialist symbolic economy.¹⁴⁶

In their pact to never be institutionalised as old women, Daisy and Lily guard against a systemic misogyny, racism, classism and homophobia in the colonialist nation New Zealand. When Daisy and Lily do make a home together it is a place of refuge where Lily’s sexual integrity is respected. Daisy explains the agreement recently reached between her and Lily: “Lily and I have this pact that neither of us will ever allow the other to go into a Home.”¹⁴⁷ In the colonialist text the British Empire is the originating signified for the signifier home-as-refuge. In the writerly text, *Daisy and Lily*, Home (read: the British Empire as home-away-from-home) signifies repeatedly as a place of danger and peril for women. Daisy has heard that residential “Homes” for the ageing in New Zealand “have a policy that no one over seventy is to be resuscitated should they have a heart attack.”¹⁴⁸

In the writerly reconstitution of home-as-refuge Daisy’s compassion, borne of her understanding of the systemic nature of sexual violence, is integral to the protection she affords Lily: “She’s a very brave woman, is my Lily. She suffers me

¹⁴⁵ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 94.

¹⁴⁶ New Zealand lesbian periodicals facilitated the dissemination of information to New Zealand lesbian communities who were extensively involved in the Rape Crisis movement. See reading list, *Country Dykes Delight* 1.1 (1992): 10. This is a reading list of books on rape, sexual abuse, and a violence recovery programme was published in 1992. See also *LORC: Lesbians of Rape Crisis Newsletter* Apr. 1991. See also “Reclaim the Night,” *Tamaki Makaurau Lesbian Newsletter* Sept. 1993: 3.

¹⁴⁷ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 9.

¹⁴⁸ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 94.

to kiss her goodnight, and she lets me hug her sometimes ... I have a secret wish that one day, before we die, Lily will turn to me and kiss me.”¹⁴⁹ A legitimating eros for this lesbian couple is signified as a compassionate sexual restraint. Daisy sobs to Lily, “I wish we hadn’t wasted so much time.”¹⁵⁰ Lily replies, “It wasn’t all wasted ... and it isn’t just us.”¹⁵¹

The grief Daisy feels for all her forfeitures is finally brought to the surface in an act of unrestrained and wilful destruction. She gets the shears from the garden shed and enters her lovingly created garden and surveys it in the light of her pain and losses. The sunflowers are a colour that she loves, but had never worn since Charlotte had told her it “makes you look too dark.”¹⁵² Daisy is both “too light for some and too dark for others.”¹⁵³ These plants are ritually sacrificed for the racist shame they have signified in Daisy’s life. When Lily finds her in the ravaged garden Daisy admits: “It’s too hard, Lily Everything’s too hard.”¹⁵⁴ Lily, in spite of her own misfortunes, takes off her gloves and with “tears running down her face, she puts her arms around [Daisy].”¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 9.

¹⁵⁰ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 175.

¹⁵¹ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 175.

¹⁵² Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 176.

¹⁵³ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 158. Murray remarks that “Daisy survives the sort of childhood we have read about in the novels of Alan Duff” 35. Alan Duff is author of *Once Were Warriors* (Auckland: Tandem, 1990), *One Night Out Stealing* (Auckland: Tandem, 1991), *State Ward* (Auckland: Vintage, 1994), and *What Becomes Of The Broken Hearted?* (Auckland: Vintage, 1996). Duff has been accused of racism in his representation of Maori as authors of their own misfortune.

¹⁵⁴ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 181.

¹⁵⁵ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 182.

In the colonialist text normative signifying operations reproduce the symbolic order of the British Empire, where discursive privilege is afforded to the subjects which most closely approximate the male-masculine-hetero-bourgeois-white subject of Western humanism. *Daisy and Lily* is a rereading of the colonialist text of empire which manifests as (at least) a nationalised ageism, misogyny, homophobia, racism and classism. Silverman refers to the writerly possibility of “re-speaking both our own subjectivity and the symbolic order.”¹⁵⁶ In the writerly text, Daisy reconstitutes a mixed-race, queer family, and her own turangawaewae—a Maori lesbian place to stand in the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand.

While *Daisy and Lily* was generally not well-received by New Zealand reviewers, its New Zealand specificity is praised in an anonymous reader’s report to the publishers of *Daisy and Lily*:

as a reader you feel ... that the Springboks [sic] Tour and Bastion Point are part of the story because it is natural and inevitable that they should be, for those particular characters at that time, and not because the writer is making a political point The story is quite firmly embedded in the culture of its time and place.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Silverman 283.

¹⁵⁷ This reader’s report commissioned by Penguin Books, was made available by Renée. In 1977-78 Bastion Point, in central Auckland, became the focus of a major protest when the local tribe, Ngati Whatua, and its supporters occupied it, only to be violently forced off by police. This land claim has since been settled, in part. See “Taihoa Bastion Point,” *Bitches, Witches and Dykes* 1.4 (1981): 14-15.

Reviewer Michael Ainsley reads this novel like “a jigsaw puzzle.”¹⁵⁸ As part of this puzzle, Ainsley reads the figure of Daisy as:

a New Zealand woman who gradually awakens to feminist and political consciousness [where] New Zealand’s own coming of age and confidence is subtly documented—through the growth of theatre, women’s and gay rights, and the unspoken legacy of violence, and through the bitter protest over racism.¹⁵⁹

The importance of the New Zealand specificity of *Daisy and Lily* is also acknowledged by reviewer Donald who makes a plea to readers to support New Zealand cultural products: “Buy New Zealand.”¹⁶⁰ Donald implicitly asks readers to support an emerging postcolonial literature, which may be political art, but which is also squarely located within a postcolonial cultural economy. The significance of *Daisy and Lily* to postcolonial cultural production in Aotearoa New Zealand is also acknowledged by reviewer Mary-Helen Ward, who describes *Daisy and Lily* as:

[A] rich tapestry of lives and stories, as pure and clear as the call of the bellbird ... There might seem to be a fair amount of coincidence in various

¹⁵⁸ Michael Ainsley, “Daisy and Lily,” rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée, *Salient* 11 Oct. 1993: 22.

¹⁵⁹ Ainsley 22.

¹⁶⁰ Donald 15.

meetings and re-meetings, but we know, don't we, life's like that, here in New Zealand. [Renée] gives us back to ourselves, in the diversity that has always existed beneath the conventional surface of New Zealand life.¹⁶¹

Reviewer Phil Coogan reads, in *Daisy and Lily*, expressions of “the casual racism of the everyday [which] gives voice to the silent in our society.”¹⁶² Reviewer Heidi van de Veire praises Renée for “ha[ving] the guts to tackle the big issues.”¹⁶³ Reviewer Heather Murray remarks that Renée “deserves the VC [Victoria Cross] for her clear-sighted view of the battle we are haplessly embroiled in; she takes few prisoners, but why should she? It is a battle to the death for the Decent Society.”¹⁶⁴ In the face of Queen Victoria's denial of lesbian sexuality, the reward that Murray feels Renée's deserves signifies as a paradox.

¹⁶¹ Mary-Helen Ward, “Tapestry rich with daily life,” rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée, *Evening Standard* 26 Mar. 1994: 16. Reviewer Nicola Chapman, “Funny, painful ‘life-story,’” rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée, *Evening Post* 17 Sept. 1993, refers to “the multiple realities which are the stuff of novels and the stuff of life” 5.

¹⁶² Phil Coogan, “Sisters of adversity,” rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée, *New Zealand Herald* 2 Oct. 1993: 2:6.

¹⁶³ Heidi van de Veire, “A testimony to love over death.” Rev. of *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by Renée. *Dominion* 6 Nov. 1993: 16.

¹⁶⁴ Murray 35.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE COLONIALIST TEXT OF HOME IN *DOES THIS MAKE SENSE TO YOU?*

Does This Make Sense To You? is a novel set in New Zealand. The time period extends from the early 1960s to the early 1990s. The characters in this novel are variously identifiable as Maori, Pakeha, heterosexual, lesbian, suburban, working-class, a truck driver, a bus driver, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, teenagers, students, actors, a thief, a Governor-General and his wife, and so on. The novel opens with middle-aged Flora Thornley standing alone in her garden. She says out loud to herself, “bugger it, I’ll run away from home.”¹ The previous evening Flora told her husband Mike that she intends to go for a holiday to Australia on her own. Flora’s quandary centres around the fact that she has just received a letter from Chloe, the daughter she gave up for adoption over twenty years ago. Flora has recently made contact with Chloe, who has answered Flora’s letter with the query: “I just want to know how a woman could give away her baby.”² Mike has no knowledge of Chloe’s existence.

Reviewer Margaret Quigley notes that Renée “has become a spokesperson for many women who feel that they have no public voice,”³ but also suggests that the purpose of her argument in *Does This Make Sense To You?* “seems dissipated in

¹ Renée, *Sense* 7.

² Renée, *Sense* 21.

³ Margaret Quigley, “A mother and child reunion is not easy,” rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, by Renée, *The Press* 24 June 1995: 14.

that the target has largely vanished.”⁴ In view of changed attitudes concerning single parenthood, reviewer Susan Graham refers to *Does This Make Sense To You?* as “a period piece.”⁵ Reviewer Kim Worthington makes the following commentary on the social and political issues addressed by Renée in *Does This Make Sense To You?*:

The New Zealand [Renée] portrays is a reservoir of wife-beating, child abuse, familial breakdown, puritanical social repression and hatred towards its marginal members, be they Maori, lesbian or women Parallels drawn between the cesspool of New Zealand society and the great tragedies of contemporary global politics are not uncommon in the novel [which] galls for it not only cheapens the horror of these international tragedies, but cheapens the emotional veracity of the novel.⁶

Worthington’s resistance to Renée’s depiction of the so-called “cesspool of New Zealand society,” is linked to her own belief that there is more truth in the “great tragedies” outside of New Zealand society. Penny Robinson also challenges Renée’s credibility, finding the cruelty depicted in *Does This Make Sense To You?* “almost inconceivable.”⁷

⁴ Quigley 14.

⁵ Susan Graham, “Her shameful secret.” rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, by Renée, *New Zealand Herald* 10 June 1995: G:6.

⁶ Kim Worthington, “The haunt of guilty memory,” rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, by Renée, *New Zealand Books*. 5.4 Oct. 1995: 6

⁷ Penny Robinson, “Does This Make Sense To You?,” rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?* by Renée, *Wanganui Chronicle* 10 June 1995: 15.

Does this make sense to you? is a question which orients the reader to how a sense of social justice is produced in the postcolonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Interviewer Jack Leigh quotes Renée: “We might be a wonderful country, but we have mucked up a few times.”⁸ Renée considers that “there’s nothing like growing up in a poor family to learn about social justice, even if you do not know the words.”⁹ In the writerly text, *Does This Make Sense To You?*, working-class Flora Thornley takes up the task of explaining the prevailing sense, or discourse of social justice which led her to give her baby away.¹⁰ She responds to Chloe’s letter:

Dear Chloe, you ask how a woman could give away her baby. I will answer your question but the only way I can do it is to tell you about me and Mum and Dad, Jean Weston, Elaine, the Home, Ka, and a million other things because they all have a bearing on it.

*Does this make sense to you?*¹¹

⁸ Jack Leigh, “Muck-up in Godzone,” rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, by Renée, *New Zealand Herald* 13 May 1995: G:6.

⁹ Leigh G:6.

¹⁰ This task is related to consequences of the Adoption Act of 1955. Anne Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974* (Bridget Williams Books Limited: Wellington, 1991) writes “there is nothing ‘natural’ about the institution of adoption. On the contrary it demonstrates that our perceptions of families, children and parents are largely socially constructed, and it is what we believe about them which matters, not what is ‘natural’—so much so that it is impossible to tell what is natural even about the feelings of those involved. Shame and pride, guilt and anger, fear and courage, grief and joy may all be innate human emotional responses, but in modern society what arouses them is often socially determined” xiii.

¹¹ Renée, *Sense* 31-32.

In light of all the factors connected to making sense in relation to Chloe's question, Flora's first response is to outline the magnitude of the task she faces. In a protracted correspondence Flora intermittently repeats and addresses the question *does this make sense to you?* Worthington remarks that Flora's reply to Chloe's letter is "written piece-meal."¹² In the classic text the proairetic code serves the production of a linear narrative by sequencing events and ideas in a predictable order. This sequencing of events also effects "the closure of the reader ... within a predetermined subject position."¹³ By fragmenting the classic text and revealing the codes responsible for its enunciation, the writerly project "'displaces' the reader ... alienates him or her from the all-too-familiar subject-position of the existing cultural regime."¹⁴ The play of signification "now occurs in slow motion."¹⁵

Flora's so-called "piece-meal" correspondence fragments a discourse of hetero-colonialist respectability. In this writerly strategy a hetero-colonialist respectability is connotatively signified in relationship to the symbolic order of the British Empire.¹⁶ The writerly text, *Does This Make Sense To You?*, traces a path of signification in the discursive constitution of a normative hetero-respectability which led to Chloe's forced adoption. *Does This Make Sense To You?* is, thus, a

¹² Worthington 6.

¹³ Silverman 248.

¹⁴ Silverman 248-49.

¹⁵ Silverman 248.

¹⁶ Peter Mann, "Does This Make Sense To You?" rev. of *Does This Make Sense to You?*, by Renée, *Otago Daily Times* 20 May 1995, refers to "the connected issues of pregnancy, adoption and marital disharmony" 25.

rereading of the symbolic order of the colonialist nation New Zealand. In this process the writerly text reconstitutes lesbian and other subjectivities queered in postcolonial Aotearoa New Zealand.

The time of Chloe's adoption coincides with period of New Zealand history in which a discourse of gendered respectability was characterised by a "populist moralism" which promulgated a belief in the impropriety of premarital sex and the virtue of complete fidelity in marriage.¹⁷ In a populist moralist discourse it is only within marriage that the ideal conditions exist to raise children. Within this discourse healthy normal sex is constructed in relation to the heterosexual monogamous married couple, and all sexual activity that falls outside of this is seen as deviant.¹⁸ Sexual intercourse, therefore, involves the whole of society.¹⁹ The normatively signified heterosexual family home is integral to this moralist discourse.

My reading of *Does This Make Sense To You?* is approached via the four principal homes featured in this novel. These are Flora's parental home, the church-run maternity Home, Mike's and Flora's home of marriage, and Ka's home for unwed

¹⁷ Allannah Ryan, "'For God, Country and Family': Populist Moralism and the New Zealand Moral Right," Masters thesis, Massey University, Palmerston North, 1986, 1.

¹⁸ Ryan 91.

¹⁹ Ryan 90. Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) read Minnie Bruce Pratt's autobiographical narrative "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" as a basis for developing their ideas about "home, identity, and community; more specifically, in the power and appeal of 'home' as a concept and a desire, its occurrence as a metaphor in feminist writings, and its challenging presence in the rhetoric of the New Right" 191. Martin and Mohanty also read unexamined notions of home, family and nation as analogous to the colonising narrative of white feminism and white identity.

pregnant women. Each of these four homes bears metonymic and metaphoric relationships to the British Empire.²⁰ As a connotative signified Home “functions as a passage or doorway through which we must pass, [but] never as the final destination.”²¹ The connotative signified “is literally an *index*: it points but does not tell Thus with its designating, silent movement, a pointing finger always accompanies the classic text.”²²

Hetero-normativity in the colonialist nation New Zealand is also signified in colonialist (read: moralist) discourse in relationship to a colonising christian hetero-morality. In a colonialist discourse of hetero-normativity, illegitimacy signifies in opposition to colonialist christian codes of morality and respectability. In a writerly exploitation of “conceptual contiguity,”²³ and “conceptual similarity,”²⁴ the church-run maternity Home bears both metonymic and metaphoric relationships to the colonialist family, home and nation, and to the British Empire. Disruptions to the classic path of truth towards the denotative signified—a God-fearing British Empire—are made possible by Flora’s fragmented and protracted correspondence to Chloe.

²⁰ In the classic text metaphor and metonymy are used to sustain the absence of a given term indefinitely. Silverman notes the “‘classic’ metaphoric situation [occurs where] one term stands in for another which it in some way resembles” 112. The “‘classic’ metonymic situation [occurs where] one term stands in for another to which it is in some way contiguous” 112-13.

²¹ Silverman 256.

²² Barthes, *S/Z* 62.

²³ Silverman 111. Silverman points out that “in a metonymic formulation ... each [term] recalls, but does not replace the other; [and] the distance between them is as important as the initial juxtaposition” 112.

²⁴ Silverman points out that metaphor “exploits [conceptual] similarity” 110.

Flora's and Mike's home of marriage offers an opportunity for rereading the hetero-colonialist working-class New Zealand family. Reviewer Gerry Webb remarks that "Flora's average-Kiwi husband Mike ... never moves far beyond stereotype."²⁵ In my reading I demonstrate how this working-class husband is connotatively signified in relationship to a hetero-masculinity which is also raced-white. In the figure of Mike these signifiers manifests as a right-wing conservatism in a colonialist context. When Flora expresses her intentions of going to Sydney, their son Dougal encourages her:

You go, Mum Don't take any notice of Dad. We're in the nineties, Dad. Women have had the vote for a hundred years. Face it, Dad, you're a right-wing conservative working-class and you still think if women stayed at home where they belonged, everything would be all right.²⁶

In response to this challenge Mike violently asserts his paternal authority over Dougal.²⁷ Mike blames Flora for his outburst: "Now see what you've done?"²⁸ He reacts to Flora's plan to go on a holiday by herself by challenging her capabilities as a housewife: "You've got plenty of time to do things for yourself. You've got all day. If you can't look after the house and the garden and find time

²⁵ Webb 55.

²⁶ Renée, *Sense* 8.

²⁷ Renée, *Sense* 8.

²⁸ Renée, *Sense* 8.

for yourself, that's not my fault."²⁹ Flora is not a good wife compared to Verna, with whom Mike is having an undisclosed affair:

[Verna] not only looks after a four-bedroomed house and garden and likes nothing better than entertaining Charlie's bowling friends and their wives at the drop of a hat, but also plays bridge to competition standard and is learning Spanish!³⁰

Flora's resistance to Mike's symbolic authority begins to surface as she expresses her anger at herself: "Fuck her peace-at-any price doormattish wet acceptance of everything."³¹ She expresses her anger by silently abusing Mike: "You're nothing but a fucking pig."³² She feels both "appalled and then exhilarated."³³ Flora begins to make sense of her relationship to her husband in a new way. She notices, for example, that he complains about the "hordes of immigrants" coming into the neighbourhood as he gives his tacit approval to a proposed local housing scheme which requires "standards ... before they'll even sell you a section. Keeps that lot out."³⁴ In this context "standards" connotatively signify in relationship to an implicit Pakeha racial, cultural, and economic superiority. Just as the writerly text

²⁹ Renée, *Sense* 15.

³⁰ Renée, *Sense* 15.

³¹ Renée, *Sense* 17.

³² Renée, *Sense* 8.

³³ Renée, *Sense* 11.

³⁴ Renée, *Sense* 11.

signifies Mike's privilege relative to other racially suspect "hordes of immigrants," Mike's working-class conservatism is also raced-white.³⁵

Following the arrival of Chloe's letter, Flora remembers Ka as the one person who brought her comfort as a young woman when she felt failed and humiliated by all around her. Ka has also written to Flora recently telling her that the son she was forced to give up for adoption has died. Ka explains that he was "killed in an accident eleven years ago. Here's me saying good morning and good night to him all these years and he's not there. Pathetic eh?"³⁶ It was Ka's letter which spurred Flora into making first contact with her own daughter.

Flora decides to turn to Ka for help. Her expressed need is for "peace and quiet while I answer that bloody insolent question" asked by Chloe.³⁷ She throws a few clothes into a bag, dons her son's baseball cap which has the word BOSS printed across the front of it, leaves her marital home in Hamilton and travels to Ka's home in Dunedin.³⁸ Ka's home in Dunedin affords Flora the freedom to reflect on the conventions of hetero-respectability which shaped her experiences in her

³⁵ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972) suggests that "the decisive actors [in colonialism] are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies" 10-11.

³⁶ Renée, *Sense* 23.

³⁷ Renée, *Sense* 24.

³⁸ Renée, *Sense* 24.

parents' home, in the church-run Home, and in her marital home. It is from Ka's home that Flora writes to Chloe.

Within her parents' home Flora learned the codes of hetero-respectability for the good wife and the dutiful daughter. In the process of making sense of her designated place in the symbolic order of the colonialist nation, Flora reflects back to 1961, the year she conceived and gave birth to Chloe. She recalls that 1961 was also the year she was selected to be fairy queen, on the float entered by the trucking company her father worked for, in the Hastings Blossom Festival Parade.³⁹ Dressed in white, with a sparkly tiara and wand with a star on it, flanked by the princesses in blue, apricot and pink, Flora and her entourage resemble the fairytale setting of the hetero-traditional white wedding. In Flora's fantasy, queens and princesses connotatively signify in relationship to brides and bridesmaids.

At the Festival dance that night Flora meets Chloe's father, Rhys Palmerston. She re-enters her imperialist-inspired bridal fantasy with her "head full of stars with captions on them like *The Handsome Prince*, *May I Have Your Hand In Marriage*, *The Bride Wears White*."⁴⁰ In this romantic fantasy, white signifies the bride's virginity necessary to an ensured patriarchal lineage, the reward for which is a princely husband. Flora's fantasy, on this occasion, contrasts sharply with later imagery of herself as "spoiled goods" and the high price she has to pay for her personal failure to accede to the terms constitutive of hetero-normative, colonialist

³⁹ Renée, *Sense* 28.

⁴⁰ Renée, *Sense* 29.

respectability.⁴¹ For example, when Flora tells her mother that she is going to marry Mike, Una responds: “You’re a very lucky girl ... Lots of men would think twice before taking on spoiled goods.”⁴² When Flora admits that she hasn’t told him about Chloe, her mother replies: “For once in your life you’ve shown a bit of sense.”⁴³

In her correspondence to Chloe, Flora writes about her courtship with Rhys which was overseen by her friend Elaine’s mother, Jean, who could be seen “watching from behind their net curtains.”⁴⁴ When Flora becomes pregnant she is incarcerated in her bedroom for several months. Flora’s confinement signifies Flora’s own mother, Una, as the moral guardian of the colonialist family (read: nation, read: empire) albeit located in the *ex*-colony. Una articulates a moralist discourse in relation to Flora’s sexual transgressions, “you make your bed and you lie in it.”⁴⁵ Flora’s youthful explanation of her own demise is couched in the same moralist rhetoric of her mother: “I’d behaved like a trollop. I’d smirched our name. I was disgusting. The least I could do was take myself out of Mum’s sight. Out of everyone’s sight.”⁴⁶ It is Una who constructs the elaborate lie to preserve

⁴¹ Renée, *Sense* 17.

⁴² Renée, *Sense* 16-17.

⁴³ Renée, *Sense* 17.

⁴⁴ Renée, *Sense* 30.

⁴⁵ Renée, *Sense* 45.

⁴⁶ Renée, *Sense* 46.

hetero-normative respectability within this family. Una, herself, is someone who puts on a “good face.”⁴⁷

Alongside Jean’s role as moral guardian of her own family and neighbours, Una makes mention of Jean’s ability to earn money as a dressmaker which keeps her family off “Queer Street.”⁴⁸ Here, Queer Street is a discursive site of indebtedness and poverty (read: economic unrespectability), a place of exile for those who fail in their wifely duties of economic thrift. In the wider text of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, Queer Street also signifies a hetero-colonialist symbolic economy of moral unrespectability. As part of the elaborate lies and subterfuges undertaken to protect the reputation of the family, Una has no compunction in forcing Flora to write weekly letters home during the time of her concealment, so that she can then read these letters to Jean. When Flora can’t think of anything to say Una insists: “Just make it up You’re used to living a lie.”⁴⁹ Even in the face of their so-called failures, stories are “made up” by women to preserve the “truth” of the respectable colonialist nation.

Flora’s mother’s family responsibilities contrast sharply with the responsibilities designated to Flora’s father. In a writerly rereading of the colonialist text of family, this man’s responsibilities are signified as responsibilities, first and foremost, to the nation. Flora’s father is depicted as a man of few words whose

⁴⁷ Renée, *Sense* 43.

⁴⁸ Renée, *Sense* 68.

⁴⁹ Renée, *Sense* 72.

“only daughter getting pregnant and not being married caused him huge disappointment, anger and shame, and perhaps there was also a feeling of failure as a father.”⁵⁰ As a soldier in World War Two he had served his country abroad to protect the virtue of its women.⁵¹ His shame is constituted, in part, by what he regards as his own failure, closer to home, to protect his daughter’s virtue.

In this context Flora is faced with what is made to look like a choice. She is visited by Rhys, who has received his own family’s instructions about the right thing to do. He comes to offer to marry her.⁵² Flora is allowed out of the prison of her bedroom and into the front room for the first time in two weeks. This family’s front room signifies as the metaphorical front parlour of the colonialist nation, its purpose being to reflect a national “standard of respectability.”⁵³ Here, the writerly text disrupts a discourse of moral respectability when Flora tells Rhys that, having made one mistake, she is not about to make another. She refuses to marry him.⁵⁴ His response is to produce a roll of money which elicits from her a

⁵⁰ Renée, *Sense* 51.

⁵¹ Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, “Introduction,” *Woman-Nation-State*, eds. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (London: The Macmillan Press, 1989) refer, as part of discussion of nationalist discourses in national liberation struggles, to the idea of the nation as “a loved woman in danger” 10.

⁵² In *A Question of Adoption*, Else notes that “the unmarried mother and her family took centre stage; the male partner and his family were almost completely ignored, as was the wider social context of gender relations” 13.

⁵³ Tristram 184.

⁵⁴ Renée, *Sense* 75.

disgusted groan.⁵⁵ The money changes hands from Rhys to her father. The men shake hands. A satisfactory economic outcome for the men is signified.⁵⁶

These front parlour economic negotiations have not, however, secured respectability for Flora within the symbolic economy of the colonialist nation. Flora sees that having chosen to avoid the confines of a teenage marriage, she has no other alternative but to once again accept the solitary confines of her room. This leaves Una in a state of disbelief at Flora's refusal of an offer of marriage (read: respectability). Flora is not a respectable member of her family. Neither does she signify as a respectable citizen of the colonialist nation New Zealand.

Lesley Caldwell argues that the major contribution in the discursive constitution of women as citizens is to the building of "a nation united."⁵⁷ Flora's personal shame is both a family secret and a national secret. Flora's father and mother have until now, kept the family's secret by keeping her locked up and out of sight at home.⁵⁸ When they can no longer guarantee that their family secret is safe they send her to a church-run maternity Home. In a writerly rereading of the symbolic order of the christian colonialist nation–New Zealand–family, church and nation

⁵⁵ Renée, *Sense* 75.

⁵⁶ Renée, *Sense* 76.

⁵⁷ Lesley Caldwell, "Women as the Family: the Foundation of a New Italy?" *Anthias and Yuval Davis* 172.

⁵⁸ In *A Question of Adoption* Else reports: "Many of the post-war experts who set out to explain single pregnancy laid a good deal of blame on the woman's parents" 12. Else quotes Major Thelma Smith, who was for twenty years the Matron of Bethany, a private hospital and Home for unmarried mothers run by the Salvation Army in Auckland: "The primary cause of an out-of-wedlock pregnancy is concerned with faulty family relationships, often including a 'dominating mother' and a 'shadowy father'" 12-13.

are linked together in the discursive constitution of “what it is to be a woman.”⁵⁹

Flora remembers that one reason her mother had confidence in placing her in the maternity Home was that the board of trustees were all members of a church.⁶⁰

In the classic text the semic code—which relies upon the specificity of the proper name for its central term—functions to define persons and characters in ideologically symptomatic ways. In the classic text the semic code operates unobtrusively. The semic code always operates in close conjunction with the cultural codes.⁶¹ In the classic deployment of the semic code the qualities which constitute a character “emerge gradually over the course of the story and, seemingly, under the pressure of the reader's investigation.”⁶² This classic fragmentation of the semic field “fosters the illusion that the ‘truth’ precedes its enunciation.”⁶³ These are the repressive dimensions of the semic codes.

The semic code can also operate overtly in the writerly text. This occurs, for example, where the quality by which a character is defined coincides with that character's name.⁶⁴ In a writerly deployment of the semic code in *Does This Make Sense To You?*, the Matron, Camille Livingstone, is immediately signified as “the

⁵⁹ Caldwell 176.

⁶⁰ Renée, *Sense* 104.

⁶¹ Silverman points out that it is only as a result of intense cultural coding that “the qualities associated with a given name can come to seem ‘natural’” 253.

⁶² Silverman 253.

⁶³ Silverman 253.

⁶⁴ Silverman 253.

most wantonly evil person [Flora] had ever met.”⁶⁵ Barthes “refers to the signifiers which provide another signifier with its semantic values as ‘semes.’”⁶⁶ The same signifiers “must attach themselves to a proper name more than once before the connection becomes permanent.”⁶⁷ When “identical semes traverse the same proper name several times and appear to settle on it, a character is created.”⁶⁸ In a writerly deployment of such “semes” the character of the Matron is soon created as a vicious and unyielding upholder of the appearance of respectability of the colonialist nation New Zealand. The Matron signifies *loco parentis* for the nation, in that the task of endorsing the moral integrity of the colonialist family is given over to her. Thus, the Matron bears both metaphoric and metonymic relationship to the hetero-normative colonialist nation in the writerly text, *Does This Make Sense To You?*

In the classic text the semic code also functions to define places. Signified as a proper name, the maternity Home becomes the metaphorical replacement for the family home by keeping the colonialist nation’s unrespectable “telling” secret at least behind closed doors. Therefore, the maternity Home also bears a metonymic relationship to the colonialist family, the colonialist nation and the British Empire.⁶⁹ As an authoritative (read: discursive) exercise in discretion at the

⁶⁵ Renée, *Sense* 94. Césaire suggests: “First we must study how colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer [such that] one fine day the bourgeoisie is awakened by a terrific reverse shock: the gestapos are busy [applying] colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa” 14.

⁶⁶ Silverman 252.

⁶⁷ Silverman 252.

⁶⁸ Barthes, *S/Z* 67.

⁶⁹ See Silverman 110.

Home, the unmarried pregnant girls' family names are kept "confidential."⁷⁰ Ka defiantly identifies herself to Flora as a "Porohiwi" from Mahia.⁷¹ She also insists on knowing Flora's family name. In so doing, Ka makes it possible for them to maintain contact after they have left the maternity Home. Along with the rest of the unmarried mothers-to-be in this closed community, they each become "Miss Livingstone."⁷² They are made to wear communal clothes except on Sundays when visitors or church officials are present.⁷³ The right to privacy is also removed as their incoming and outgoing correspondence is censored.⁷⁴ This is done to protect the girls' families whose hearts have been broken and have had their respectable names "rubbed in the dirt."⁷⁵

Reviewer Susan Graham notes that Ka is "a Maori as it happens."⁷⁶ In the writerly text, *Does This Make Sense To You?*, Ka's being Maori is no mere matter of chance. Ka is pregnant to a Pakeha boy. She is aware that this confirms what everyone already knows: "Maori girls are easy."⁷⁷ In keeping with a colonialist discourse of raced-sexuality, Ka ironically races herself incontinent. Ka's parents, whom she describes as wanting to "make it in the Pakeha world," wanted her to marry

⁷⁰ Renée, *Sense* 96.

⁷¹ Renée, *Sense* 98.

⁷² Renée, *Sense* 96.

⁷³ Renée, *Sense* 96.

⁷⁴ Renée, *Sense* 96.

⁷⁵ Renée, *Sense* 97.

⁷⁶ Susan Graham, "Her shameful secret." rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, by Renée, *New Zealand Herald* 10 June 1995: G:6.

⁷⁷ Renée, *Sense* 103.

someone from Ngai Tahu.⁷⁸ Because they didn't want grandchildren of "mixed blood,"⁷⁹ Ka's parents arrange through some Pakeha friends for her to go to the church-run maternity Home. In these, and in other ways the figure of Ka is integral to a writerly rereading of the colonialist text of Home.

Ka recounts an event from her childhood when a petition was organised by their Pakeha neighbours to have her family removed from the neighbourhood. The neighbours efforts failed when it was discovered the Porohiwis were not simply renting, but owned the house in which they were living.⁸⁰ Ka's mother stressed that to succeed in a Pakeha world "we had to be better than best."⁸¹ Ka says her relationship with her parents has never been the same since her child was killed in a car crash some years ago. She says they feel guilty about the death of their mokopuna.⁸² Ka's parents belated reference to Ka's child as their "mokopuna," signifies both a precolonial and postcolonial indigenous familial economy. Flora says she has, in hindsight, decided that her own parents were people who have would not ever have thought of Chloe as their grandchild. Flora's family remained "people of their time."⁸³ This family's "time" is signified as colonialist.

⁷⁸ Renée, *Sense* 103.

⁷⁹ Renée, *Sense* 103.

⁸⁰ Renée, *Sense* 103.

⁸¹ Renée, *Sense* 103-4.

⁸² Renée, *Sense* 110.

⁸³ Renée, *Sense* 111.

In the writerly text, *Does This Make Sense To You?*, the church-run maternity Home is multiply signified as a place of confinement, punishment and correction for unmarried pregnant girls. Flora describes an episode where she, Ka, and Freddie plan an escape to buy fish and chips, as like planning a prisoner-of-war escape.⁸⁴ Their collective bid for temporary freedom was “a sign saying we were not completely broken, that lurking beneath our obedient exteriors was the other unquenchable real self.”⁸⁵ The unwed pregnant teenagers are also made to work as unpaid labour in the Home which is also a profit-making organisation. Freddie is introduced as the laundry slave.⁸⁶ Freddie who is thirteen years old is watched over by Ka, who learns that Freddie’s mother is dead and that “she’d first been raped by her father when she was eleven.”⁸⁷

Freddie is nervous and compliant. Ka tells Flora that Freddie arrived at the maternity Home covered in bruises inflicted by her father. Freddie’s experiences have blunted her sensibilities. Her need to have things explained over and over to her makes her “a sitting duck.”⁸⁸ The Matron frequently bullies Freddie, making her redo her laundry duties during which time she misses many meals. Flora believes that without her and Ka, Freddie would have “dropped from malnutrition.”⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Renée, *Sense* 135.

⁸⁵ Renée, *Sense* 136.

⁸⁶ Renée, *Sense* 104.

⁸⁷ Renée, *Sense* 104.

⁸⁸ Renée, *Sense* 104.

⁸⁹ Renée, *Sense* 116.

Flora describes their economic function in the Home: “[U]s girls were the petrol which drove the motor.”⁹⁰ The mechanistic metaphor is reintroduced in relation to the strict regimentation applied to the work schedules. Rules and routines are strictly enforced according to the Matron’s insistence on the value of training in “[t]ime and motion Then we know where we are.”⁹¹ The girls are in a factory designed to reproduce the symbolic economy of the colonialist nation in the limited time before their babies are born. Flora and Ka speculate on why they put up with their treatment, and how the Matron gets away with it.⁹² Flora reads her harsh treatment as being for her “own good.”⁹³ In a later, writerly, reflection on her predetermined subject position within the symbolic order of the hetero-normative colonialist nation, Flora remarks: “We put up with it all because deep down we shared our family’s disgust and outrage at our behaviour and ... we saw the Home experience as part of the retribution we deserved for such disgusting carryings-on.”⁹⁴

The public face of the church-run maternity Home is presented by a rose-lined brick pathway and a “posh, classy” entrance.⁹⁵ In contrast to the public face of the Home, the dormitories for the unmarried girls are stark and cold.⁹⁶ Furthermore, a

⁹⁰ Renée, *Sense* 93.

⁹¹ Renée, *Sense* 95.

⁹² Renée, *Sense* 117.

⁹³ Renée, *Sense* 117.

⁹⁴ Renée, *Sense* 117.

⁹⁵ Renée, *Sense* 93.

⁹⁶ Renée, *Sense* 94-95.

clear difference is made between the married and the unmarried women, and between their respective babies. This difference is most starkly represented in the Orphanage which is on the same premises as the Home. In colonialist discourse both Home and Orphanage signify as refuge. In the writerly text, *Does This Make Sense To You?* the semic code operates overtly in its signification of the Orphanage as a place of exile where disabled and mixed-race children are the “unadoptables,” who have no respectable place in the colonialist nation. As part of making sense of Chloe’s forced adoption, Flora describes to Chloe her reaction upon entering the Orphanage as thinking she had “arrived in hell.”⁹⁷

During their time in the maternity Home, Flora and Ka volunteer to work in the Orphanage where they witness these children being systematically neglected and ill-treated. These babies are described by Flora as not unlike small animals grunting and snarling, enclosed behind wire fences, deprived of toys, or confined to their cots in a state of stupefied silence as it was forbidden to talk to them.⁹⁸

Flora likens the Orphanage at the maternity Home to orphanages internationally televised when Rumania became accessible to the West. Flora remarks: “Rumania didn’t invent those hellish places, just like the Nazis didn’t invent concentration camps.”⁹⁹ In this remark, the colonialist nation New Zealand is paradigmatically and syntagmatically aligned with other repressive institutions in more overtly dictatorial countries.

⁹⁷ Renée, *Sense* 101.

⁹⁸ Renée, *Sense* 101. Cunninghame notes that the Orphanage displays “all the care and humanity of a concentration camp in the Gulag” 30.

⁹⁹ Renée, *Sense* 101.

The unholy alliance between family, church, and the colonialist nation is signified in the writerly text when the Governor-General, accompanied by his “lady” wife, pays a visit to the Orphanage.¹⁰⁰ As the Queen’s representative of the British Empire, the Governor-General signifies *loco parentis* in the absence of the girl’s own fathers, as well as *loco parentis* for the unborn children. The Governor General also signifies a christian imperialism when he pauses in the chapel “for reflection.”¹⁰¹ In this instance the Governor-General is signified as *loco parentis* for the patriarchal christian God. In this chapel the girls are taught about the woman who touches the hem of Christ’s garment.¹⁰² This learned helplessness and dependence on a hierarchy of patriarchal figureheads is absorbed by everyone in the Home, including the Matron.

Flora describes the naiveté of the girls in the Home as pathetic.¹⁰³ She discloses that “secretly [between Freddie, Ka and herself] we confessed that we wanted to keep our babies.”¹⁰⁴ Almost routinely, however, the girls were pressured to do what was considered best for the baby, giving it a “better” life with two respectable parents in a christian family home.¹⁰⁵ Freddie also knows that her father will continue to sexually abuse her and that it would not be long before she

¹⁰⁰ Renée, *Sense* 120.

¹⁰¹ Renée, *Sense* 120.

¹⁰² Renée, *Sense* 122.

¹⁰³ Renée, *Sense* 117.

¹⁰⁴ Renée, *Sense* 117.

¹⁰⁵ Renée, *Sense* 144.

would be pregnant again and back in the Home. The Matron's punishes Freddie by her making her unnecessarily endure a long and painful labour. The Matron's cruelty is the prelude to a tragic outcome for Freddie, when she kills her baby and herself "having gone beyond what anyone can endure."¹⁰⁶ Under those circumstances Freddie's suicide can be read as a strategy for surviving, or surmounting, a colonialist symbolic economy.¹⁰⁷

It is in the circumstances surrounding Freddie's death that the role of the Matron in the maintenance of the symbolic economy is most starkly represented.¹⁰⁸ Ka and Flora discover Freddie's body hanging from the pulley in the laundry.¹⁰⁹ In a desperate attempt to gain some good from Freddie's suicide, they make a deal with the Matron to not disclose the details of the deaths of Freddie and her baby, in return for her promise to let them keep their own babies. Their agreement is not honoured. Their chances of making anyone believe their story is slight. As the Matron points out to Flora:

No one will believe you. They'll think you're just a lazy little tart making trouble. The doctor and I have explained about post-natal hysteria to the

¹⁰⁶ Renée, *Sense* 142.

¹⁰⁷ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg, and Paula A. Treichler (London: Macmillan, 1988) who explores suicide as a form of agency for postcolonial women in India. See also Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998) who refers, in the context of the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany, to those "who asserted themselves by dying" 139.

¹⁰⁸ Renée, *Sense* 142.

¹⁰⁹ Renée, *Sense* 141.

trustees and they perfectly understand that sometimes girls in this state aren't quite responsible for their actions.¹¹⁰

In an interview with Andrew Johnston, Renée remarks: "Looking back women wonder whatever could they have been thinking."¹¹¹ Silverman has pointed out that if the subject successfully assimilates the authority inherent in the symbolic order "[s]he will find [her]self 'at home' in those discourses and institutions which define [it]."¹¹² During their confinement in the maternity Home, Flora and Ka show themselves to have assimilated the authority inherent in the symbolic order of the colonialist nation which underlies their treatment. It is only later in their lives that they are able to reread their location in the colonialist sexual economy.

Jean and Una had "an unspoken rule that neither ... visited each other in the evenings when their husbands were home."¹¹³ In stark contrast, Ka's home in Dunedin offers round-the-clock female companionship. One night Ka goes weeping to Flora telling her "I can't get old things out of my mind."¹¹⁴ "Why the hell should you?" is Flora's retort.¹¹⁵ Ka suggests that "we must both be a little

¹¹⁰ Renée, *Sense* 145.

¹¹¹ Andrew Johnston, "Unwed mum's tale makes sense to many readers," rev. of *Does This Make Sense to You?*, by Renée, *Evening Post* 10 May 1995: 5.

¹¹² Silverman 141.

¹¹³ Renée, *Sense* 67.

¹¹⁴ Renée, *Sense* 91.

¹¹⁵ Renée, *Sense* 91.

crazy.”¹¹⁶ Flora contradicts her: “No more so than the ones who tell us to forget.”¹¹⁷ Flora suggests to Ka that Chloe thinks of her as “[s]omeone who just up and gave away her kid, no sweat, just dumped it because she couldn’t care less.”¹¹⁸ Ka’s opinion of Chloe is that “[i]t’s obvious she’s had it too easy.”¹¹⁹ Flora asks herself: “has [Chloe] never read anything?”¹²⁰ This question is tied to Flora’s own recollection of the “scanty knowledge” and “half-truths” about sexuality she had had to glean from her peers.¹²¹ In spite of, or perhaps because of, a generalised prohibition on the production and dissemination of information about sexuality, from the little information there was to be had Flora remembers most clearly the message: “Men don’t like marrying girls who are too easy.”¹²²

Flora reflects that she has kept the secret of her friendship with Ka for as long as she has kept the secret of Chloe’s existence.¹²³ She poses the question as to why: “It’s not because she’s Maori. At least I don’t think so. Lesbian? Possibly.”¹²⁴ In the writerly text, *Does This Make Sense To You?*, Ka’s Maori lesbian sexuality is a rereading of the colonialist text of a sexed-gendered-sexualised-raced

¹¹⁶ Renée, *Sense* 91.

¹¹⁷ Renée, *Sense* 91.

¹¹⁸ Renée, *Sense* 111.

¹¹⁹ Renée, *Sense* 111.

¹²⁰ Renée, *Sense* 21.

¹²¹ Renée, *Sense* 77.

¹²² Renée, *Sense* 77.

¹²³ Renée, *Sense* 85.

¹²⁴ Renée, *Sense* 85.

respectability. Ka works at “The Haven,” a refuge for battered women. Ka’s home is also a refuge for unmarried pregnant girls, whom Ka finds by putting ads in the paper and notices in the pub and supermarket. She offers them a place in “a private home with an understanding woman [who] had experienced pregnancy herself.”¹²⁵

Flora learns that Ka “has placed seven Maori and ten Pakeha girls over the last two years.”¹²⁶ One of these girls is Annie who, though young, unmarried and pregnant, is also cheeky and defiant.¹²⁷ In contrast to the way Ka and Flora allowed themselves to be treated in the maternity Home, Annie asserts that “someone in my condition shouldn’t be carrying buckets of water.”¹²⁸ In light of her own experiences, Flora speculates on Annie’s predicament: “What is to be done about her? And the baby. Something has to be done. But what? And who will do it?”¹²⁹ Under the protection afforded by Ka, Annie is given the opportunity to find a personal solution; one not predetermined by the moral imperatives of the symbolic order of the hetero-colonialist nation.

Ka tells Flora of her plans to expand this service with community assistance. Ka’s application for funding to help finance this venture evokes a moral outrage in the form of racist and homophobic letters to the local paper:

¹²⁵ Renée, *Sense* 34.

¹²⁶ Renée, *Sense* 35.

¹²⁷ Renée, *Sense* 55.

¹²⁸ Renée, *Sense* 123.

¹²⁹ Renée, *Sense* 111.

It is wrong that public money should be spent on funding for such a scheme “Ms” Porohiwi’s sexuality and politics make her unfit to be a supervisor of any organisation which deals with young women, pregnant or not. Feminists and lesbian feminists are responsible for the breakdown of the family and women like “Ms” Porohiwi should not be allowed to do further damage by perverting the minds of these unfortunate young girls signed “Mother of Ten.”¹³⁰

Ka’s rereading of these objections is a sharp abridgement of the hetero-racist colonialist text:

It’s yet another wheeze for Maori to take funding away from Pakeha, or it’s all a lesbian plot, or a mixture of both. We should all be taken out and shot. We’re filthy, perverted, sick and we shouldn’t be allowed anywhere near young girls.¹³¹

Whereas in the church-run maternity Home unwed pregnant girls were punished for transgressions within a normative gender requirement, prescribed as a heterosexual relationship properly contained within marriage, their transgression in becoming pregnant did not leave the arena of compulsory heterosexuality. The moral attack to which Ka is subjected as an adult lesbian is because lesbians are

¹³⁰ Renée, *Sense* 52.

¹³¹ Renée, *Sense* 35-36.

defined by the operation of sexual, not gender, stratification.¹³² Ka articulates the sexed-gendered-raced constitution of her Maori lesbian sexuality in a colonialist context.¹³³ She is a feminist, therefore, she is a gender outlaw. She is a lesbian, therefore, she is a sexual outlaw. She is Maori, therefore, she is sexually incontinent.

The next published letter completes the constitution of the colonialist text of lesbian subjectivity by articulating a discursive christian contingency:

God will not be mocked. If there is one unclean let them be cast out before they pollute the rest. Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord. It is bad enough when men engage in these filthy practices—it is unthinkable when women do. I think the birch should be brought back and these demented and evil people beaten until they repent and seek God’s forgiveness and the Peace that Passeth all Understanding signed “Happy in God’s Love.”¹³⁴

Where women’s sexuality is controlled through the ideological alliance of the family, church and colonialist nation state, there is no public discourse of lesbian

¹³² Rubin 33. Ryan also suggests that “moral panics are usually centred around those at the bottom of the sexual hierarchy” 69.

¹³³ Rubin refers to “hierarchies of sexual values—which function in much the same way as do ideological systems of racism, ethnocentrism, and religious chauvinism. They rationalise the well-being of the sexually privileged and the adversity of the sexual rabble” 13.

¹³⁴ Renée, *Sense* 52-53. Ryan argues that within the discourse of “populist moralism” people are seen “as creatures of passion and therefore appeals [are] often based on emotionally charged and seemingly irrational grounds” 3.

sexuality.¹³⁵ What lesbians “do” is, therefore, “unthinkable.” Understandably, Ka’s lesbianism is, thus far, also a mystery to Flora. Ka has mentioned a “wonderful woman” in her correspondence to Flora, but Flora’s only prior knowledge of lesbian sexuality consists of scandalous media reports.

The text of lesbian subjectivity is constituted, in part, via its hostile demonisation by the public press. It is also constituted via the speculative suppositions of Flora and Annie. Annie gives voice to Flora’s naive and unasked questions about lesbians. “Are you a lezzie?” Annie asks Flora.¹³⁶ “Ka is,” Annie says, “but I don’t mind her helping me out of the bath. She doesn’t try anything on.”¹³⁷ “[E]mboldened by three sherries,” Flora asks Ka “[w]hy don’t we become lovers?”¹³⁸ Her presumptive question prompts a sharply truthful reply from Ka: “Just because I’m a lesbian doesn’t mean I pant after every woman I meet. I don’t fancy you, okay?”¹³⁹

Flora looks around Ka’s room and notices that the bed is large. She thinks about “Ka and a woman” on Ka’s bed.¹⁴⁰ Ka describes to Flora the demise of her

¹³⁵ Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978) suggests that a lover’s discourse is “a discourse forsaken by the surrounding languages; ignored, disparaged, or derided by them, severed not only from authority but also from the mechanisms of authority ... driven by its own momentum into the backwater of the ‘unreal’” 1.

¹³⁶ Renée, *Sense* 55.

¹³⁷ Renée, *Sense* 55.

¹³⁸ Renée, *Sense* 136.

¹³⁹ Renée, *Sense* 136.

¹⁴⁰ Renée, *Sense* 32.

relationship with “the wonderful woman.”¹⁴¹ She tells Flora: “We fell out in 81.”¹⁴² Ka tells Flora that the once “wonderful woman” was not able “to see what the fuss was about.”¹⁴³ Ka explains that falling out over the Springbok rugby tour that year “happened to quite a few people.”¹⁴⁴ Flora recalls that Mike’s brother Walter, had fallen out with Mike because of Mike’s ignorance about the relationship between racist sporting practices in South Africa and racism in the colonialist nation New Zealand.¹⁴⁵

Ka, Flora and Annie drive around the hills of Dunedin. In a writerly deployment of the semic code, Annie tells Ka and Flora that “the locals” call a particular place “Tit hill.”¹⁴⁶ Ka comments: “First thing you do, change the names.”¹⁴⁷ Ka’s insight into this aspect of a wider British textual imperialism is elaborated when they come across a cemetery in which the poet Thomas Bracken is buried. Ka

¹⁴¹ Renée, *Sense* 137. The wider problem to which Ka alludes—that of Maori lesbians being subject to racism within the lesbian community—was addressed by “Michelle Tohi speaks on behalf of Wahine Mo Nga Wahine O Te Moana Nui A Kiwa at the Lesbian/Gay Conference in Ponake (Wellington),” *Lesbians In Print* 4 (1985): 7-8.

¹⁴² Renée, *Sense* 137.

¹⁴³ Renée, *Sense* 137. Ka’s cryptic explanation for the end of her relationship with the once “wonderful woman” signifies a more general bewilderment experienced throughout the nation as people impassioned by the surfacing of a politics of anti-racism, were unable to continue in relationships with those who did not share their beliefs.

¹⁴⁴ Renée, *Sense* 137. See Alba 4-6.

¹⁴⁵ Renée, *Sense* 11. Michael Joseph Savage Thornley and his brother Walter Nash Thornley are named for New Zealand Labour Party Prime Ministers in the 1930’s. In 1935 Michael Joseph Savage became the first Labour Prime Minister of New Zealand. Savage saw it as the state’s duty to provide an adequate standard of living for all people “from the cradle to the grave.” Walter Nash introduced the Social Security Bill 1938 to reduce poverty in New Zealand. See Craig Mackenzie, *Walter Nash: Pioneer and Prophet* (Dunmore Press: Palmerston North, 1975).

¹⁴⁶ Renée, *Sense* 110.

¹⁴⁷ Renée, *Sense* 110.

informs Flora and Annie that “he wrote the words to [God of Nations] the national anthem.”¹⁴⁸

On this same journey Ka, Flora and Annie visit the albatross colony also on the Otago peninsula. Ka queers the classic text of hetero-motherhood when she makes a joke about two female albatrosses as “a lesbian pair They make wonderful foster parents.”¹⁴⁹ On this same excursion, Ka takes Flora and Annie to visit two older lesbians, Mon, who is Maori, and Lila, who is Pakeha. Mon and Lila live together on “Maori land” at the end of the peninsula. Ka informs Flora and Annie that this designated “Maori land” was set aside in 1844.¹⁵⁰ Ka reads this as a colonising compromise: “Didn’t quite push [Maori] into the sea, but close.”¹⁵¹ In their effective occupation of this marginalised Maori land over many decades, this mixed-raced, lesbian couple, Mon and Lila, stake a queer claim in the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand.¹⁵² At the birth of Annie’s baby girl, the midwife asks Ka if they want to keep the placenta which, in Maori tradition, is buried at a

¹⁴⁸ Renée, *Sense* 109.

¹⁴⁹ Renée, *Sense* 126.

¹⁵⁰ Renée, *Sense* 109.

¹⁵¹ Renée, *Sense* 124.

¹⁵² For a Maori woman’s perspective on indigenous land rights see Eva Rickard, “He Wahine He Whenua,” interview with Maggie Tully, abr. and reprinted from *New Zealander*, in *Bitches, Bitches, And Dykes: A Women’s Liberation Newspaper* 1.3 (1981): 11. See also Katherine, “Lesbians and Maori Sovereignty. Or: Who Killed the Moa?” *Glad Rag* May 1983: 17-18. On the occasion of her 70th birthday in April 1995, Maori activist Eva Rickard asked those of her guests who had not brought her a gift to each give \$1.00 to the cause of Maori Nation. It was reported, *Waikato Times* 9 Jan, 1997, that in February 1996 Rickard had declared the twenty-five hectare former golf course, which had been reclaimed via her political struggles in the 1980s, a separate sovereign state under the control of Maori authority. Eva Rickard died in December 1997.

site that signifies a person belongs to that land.¹⁵³ Ka replies: “She might as well know where she belongs.”¹⁵⁴

“Does this make sense to you?” is a question which implicitly addresses the fundamental problematic of poststructuralist approaches to questions of representation. That is: “How is meaning produced?” “Common sense [and] Good sense,”¹⁵⁵ are made to signify queerly in the writerly text, *Does This Make Sense To You?* In summation of her protracted answer to the question put to her by Chloe: “*I just want to know how a woman could give away her baby?*,”¹⁵⁶ Flora reaches a limited closure in making sense of her own story: “*Well that’s how it happened to me.*”¹⁵⁷

Reviewer Sally Moore implies a widely constituted readership for *Does This Make Sense To You?* when she comments: “It is a startling and sobering realisation that this is the story of many women in New Zealand. I would imagine Flora’s story makes a lot of sense to lot of women.”¹⁵⁸ In contrast, Webb’s comment that this is “a women’s story in which an obvious feminist bias is offset by the inclusion of a female monster,”¹⁵⁹ is somewhat superficial and defensive.

¹⁵³ Renée, *Sense* 154.

¹⁵⁴ Renée, *Sense* 154.

¹⁵⁵ Renée, *Sense* 17.

¹⁵⁶ Renée, *Sense* 21.

¹⁵⁷ Renée, *Sense* 159.

¹⁵⁸ Sally Moore, “Does This Make Sense To You,” rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, by Renée, *Capital Times* 21.3 (1995): 8.

¹⁵⁹ Webb 55.

In colonialist discourse, Home connotatively signifies a respectably normative and compulsory heterosexuality properly contained within a, preferably, christian marriage. In the writerly text, *Does This Make Sense To You?*, the so-called true and literal Signified, a God-fearing British Empire, is reread via the metaphor of Home. This is, simultaneously, a rereading of the triple alliance between family, church, and the British Empire in the colonialist nation New Zealand. In an interview with Kirstin Mills, Renée identified respectability as:

a priority that overrode everything else respectability was a state of mind. Treating unmarried mothers that way (callously) wasn't thought of as cruel Some people knew what was going on behind the doors of homes like that ... and others did not want to know.¹⁶⁰

As one who does not want to know, interviewer Leigh finds it “hard to accept an implied parallel of a ‘charitable maternity home’ with Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.”¹⁶¹ Where Leigh reads charity into the classic text of hetero-normativity, I read malice towards those who constitute a nation’s internal enemies.

In her efforts to discredit Renée’s literary project, reviewer Worthington condemns *Does This Make Sense To You?* as “sensationalism masquerading as earnest social realism.”¹⁶² Worthington seeks confirmation of her opinion of *Does*

¹⁶⁰ Kirstin Mills, “Renée’s story makes sense,” *Evening Standard* 27 May 1995: 9.

¹⁶¹ Leigh G:6.

¹⁶² Worthington 6.

This Make Sense To You? in a literature she considers more credible by virtue of its more authentic origins:

Perhaps such institutions did exist in New Zealand in the 1960s; intolerance, racial hatred and child abuse certainly existed, still exist and need exposure. Nonetheless, one can't help feeling that Renée has found her precedents in Dickens or Brontë rather than in contemporary New Zealand society.¹⁶³

Whether or not Dickens or Brontë were intentionally invoked in Renée's literary (read: textual) enterprise, Worthington's discrediting disapproval ironically confirms the extent to which Renée implicitly engages with British textual imperialisms in the writerly project of *Does This Make Sense To You?* These imperialist influences are felt by reviewer Pamela Cunninghame who describes *Does This Make Sense To You?* as "a shuddering exposure to the Victorian mores of the 60s."¹⁶⁴

Reviewer Chapman suggests that "apart from Flora herself, the other characters and pivotal relationships are underdeveloped."¹⁶⁵ Chapman maintains that Ka "despite her struggles, remains a superficial character."¹⁶⁶ When reviewer Philip

¹⁶³ Worthington 6.

¹⁶⁴ Cunninghame, "Runaway Success," 30.

¹⁶⁵ Chapman, "Closed adoption's silent sufferers," 5.

¹⁶⁶ Chapman, "Closed adoption's silent sufferers," 5.

Mann refers to Ka as Flora's "Maori woman friend,"¹⁶⁷ and reviewer Marie Drager refers to Ka as Flora's "long time friend,"¹⁶⁸ the joint failure of these reviewers to include mention of Ka's adult Maori lesbian sexuality constitutes a colonising oversight, for it is precisely via the figure of Ka that the hetero-racist, homophobic, christian, colonialist nation can be reread. In the writerly text, *Does This Make Sense To You?*, it is the figure of Ka which manifests the postcolonial lesbian text.

¹⁶⁷ Mann 25.

¹⁶⁸ Marie Drager, "A fine tale that does make sense," rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, by Renée, *Napier Daily Telegraph* 10 May 1995: 16.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE COLONIALIST TEXT OF NATION IN *THE SNOWBALL WALTZ*

The Snowball Waltz is a uniquely New Zealand name for a dance in which, when the music starts:

two people invited by the Master (or, in this case, Mistress) of Ceremonies, begin to waltz. When the music stops they separate and seek other partners from those sitting or standing around the edge of the dance floor The pattern of music, dance, silence, separation, music, dance, silence, separation, is repeated until all the people in the room are up and waltzing. The Snowball Waltz then continues with the same partners until the music stops, the dance ends and the dancers go their separate ways.¹

In a writerly rereading of the signifying imperatives of the colonialist nation New Zealand, *The Snowball Waltz* fragments the classic text of hetero-colonialist patriotic nationalism in the lead-up to the celebration of VE Day in 1995.² Particular events which affect the lives of succeeding generations of families from the fictional town of Porohiwi, including indigenes and descendants of immigrants, are traced and retraced over the course of the novel. Porohiwi is a small coastal town in the Gisborne region of Te Ika A Maui, the North Island of

¹ Renée, *Snowball* 7. *Snowball* is structured in two halves; Part One: *The Music Starts* 9-104, and Part Two: *All the People Are Up And Dancing* 105-84.

² VE Day commemorates Victory in Europe for the British Army and its Allied forces in World War Two.

Aotearoa New Zealand. Events in the novel take place in the years between 1916 and 1995. The years 1916, 1930 and 1995 correlate with incidents of xenophobic, racist and misogynist terrorism in Porohiwi. These are also years which mark times of national economic recession.

In this scenario where Porohiwian people are all part of the dance, Gertrude Nusz—the daughter of New Zealand-born Bill Nusz, himself the son of German immigrant parents, and Kathleen Nusz (née Dillon), of Irish parentage—is the Mistress of Ceremonies. The *Snowball Waltz*—in which no one invited to dance may refuse—is a sustained metaphor of small-town community dynamics, where the accumulative effects of past events result in outcomes of equally expanded proportions.

In comparison to Renée’s three earlier adult novels, *The Snowball Waltz* was not widely reviewed. It would be purely speculative of me to suggest reasons for this. The smaller number of reviews reflect a more generally favourable response than was accorded to the three prior novels. In a reflection of a particular criticism leveled at each of the earlier novels, reviewer Else found *The Snowball Waltz* to be “just a bit crowded.”³ In the midst of what Else describes as “an enormous cast,” she also felt “rushed along.”⁴ In this commentary, Else unwittingly highlights Renée’s writerly deployment of the metaphor of the *Snowball Waltz*.

³ Else, Interview.

⁴ Else, Interview.

The writerly text “promotes an infinite play of signification; in it there [is] no transcendental signified, only provisional ones which function in turn as signifiers.”⁵ In *The Snowball Waltz*, a colonialist nationalism is a provisional signified, which functions in turn as a signifier of a hetero-normative, patriotic, homophobic, xenophobic, misogynist, ageist, masculinist, christian nationalism. The writerly text traces the constitution of hetero-colonialist patriotic nationalism across three generations, via two acts of gang rape which signify *rite de passage* from boyhood innocence to hetero-masculinist patriotic manhood in Porohiwi. A hetero-colonialist patriotic masculinity in Porohiwi is constituted in the figures of Arthur Tubb, Francis Wright, Fred Jingle, Affy Jingle, and an unknown number of anonymous rapists. A rereading of this colonialist text of masculinist nationalism occurs in the figuration of Stephen Nusz, William Nusz, Soft Jack Dillon, Thomas Johnson Stone, Daniel Porohiwi, Ollie Jingle, and Vincent Dix. A rereading of a hetero-nationalist christian sexuality occurs in the figuration of the lesbian couple Souvie Nusz and Resa Urney.

Porohiwi’s violent history is reread, in *The Snowball Waltz*, in relationship to the British Empire and its allied forces in two world wars against a common German enemy.⁶ The discursive constitution of a common German enemy (read: alien outsider) is consolidated in the figures of Bill Nusz—who bought fifty acres in north Porohiwi at the beginning of the century—his daughter Gertrude and her

⁵ Silverman 246.

⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 39. Beryl Fletcher, “Renée presents anatomy of small-town prejudice,” rev. of *The Snowball Waltz*, by Renée, *Waikato Times* 4 Oct. 1997, notes that Porohiwi “holds its history in its face, eroded, stripped, grey” 7.

brothers Gerard, Stephen, and William. An enemy insider is consolidated in the figure of Thomas Johnson Stone (Tom), a conscientious objector who becomes Gertrude's lover.

Reviewer Joy Mackenzie remarks that *The Snowball Waltz* offers “a gritty slice of life in a small rural community with its attendant, scandal, bigotry, mixture of good-heartedness, ignorance and bliss.”⁷ She suggests that Porohiwi is the “sort of place you drive through on your way to somewhere else.”⁸ Whereas Mackenzie attributes a certain insignificance to Porohiwi, reviewer Beryl Fletcher asserts that Porohiwi “could stand as the quintessential small town at the centre of much twentieth century literature both from New Zealand and other post-colonial countries.”⁹ In my reading of *The Snowball Waltz*, Porohiwi is a metaphor of the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand.

The town of Porohiwi can be surveyed from Cemetery Hill, a vantage point from which Porohiwian dead are mute observers of the human and geophysical divisions which demarcate the town. From Cemetery Hill it is clearly visible that Porohiwi is divided north from south by the Porohiwi River. The topographical border constituted by the Porohiwi River,

⁷ Joy Mackenzie, “Life in small town often out of step,” rev. of *The Snowball Waltz* by Renée, *Sunday Star-Times* 26 Oct. 1997: E:6.

⁸ Mackenzie E:6.

⁹ Fletcher 7.

not only divides the town in half, it effectively delineates where Maori and Pakeha live. All the permutations from interracial marriages, generations ago, or yesterday, have to decide which side is for them. A lot depends on how dark they are.¹⁰

Thus, the Porohiwi River manifests both a topographical border and a racial border, as a permeable “site of simultaneous prohibition and production, [not] only the site of distinction but also and equally the site of undifferentiation.”¹¹ The interchange made both necessary and possible by this fluid border is evident. In 1995 the community facilities on the northern side of Porohiwi consist of “[o]ne pub, one doctor, a couple of dairies, two marae, one primary school.”¹² By contrast, “[m]ost of the shops, all the banks, two doctors, the hospital, two primary schools, an intermediate school, various churches are on the southern side.”¹³ Porohiwi College, “though it has a student population seventy percent Maori, is in South Porohiwi.”¹⁴ The mixed communities on either side of the Porohiwi River can be seen to have common interests as well as divided loyalties.

In *The Snowball Waltz*, the denotative signified—the British Empire—is also a connotative signified, a signified which itself connotes and in so doing perpetuates

¹⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 31.

¹¹ Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics* 138. Geoff Bennington, “Postal politics and the institution of the nation,” in Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, argues: “Frontiers are articulations, boundaries are, constitutively, crossed or transgressed” 121.

¹² Renée, *Snowball* 32.

¹³ Renée, *Snowball* 32.

¹⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 32.

the play of signification. Porohiwi is typical of many rural New Zealand towns.¹⁵ It has in common with numerous other towns constituted during British Imperialism, street names like the ubiquitous Shakespeare Street,¹⁶ and Vogel Road,¹⁷ the latter named after pioneer and explorer of early colonialist New Zealand, Sir Julius Vogel. The community service buildings, The RSA,¹⁸ The Salvation Army,¹⁹ and the Passion Palace,²⁰ each connotatively signifies the symbolic order of the British Empire. The Returned Servicemen's Association is a feature of all New Zealand towns and cities, its textual presence connoting the military authority inherent in British imperialist enterprises. The Salvation Army connotes the christian authority institutionalised in the foundation of the British Empire. The Passion Palace connotatively signifies a legitimating eros for the hetero-colonialist nation.

Reviewer Fletcher attests to the violent substructure of the small town of Porohiwi when she finds the main theme of *The Snowball Waltz* to be “the anatomy of prejudice,” which lies in “the twinned nature of hatred and love.”²¹ Fletcher's

¹⁵ Changes in colonialist land use from moderate-sized farming and timber milling to large-scale tree farming resulted in population losses from small towns—like the fictional Porohiwi—in the late colonial period.

¹⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 30. The town of Cambridge, where I grew up, is divided east from west by the Waikato River. On the west, which was populated predominantly by Maori, all the new streets were named after British poets. I lived with my Pakeha family in Shakespeare Street in a developing district which was made to signify the text of British cultural superiority. Friends lived variously in Byron Street, Shelley Street, Keats Terrace, Pope Street and Scott Street.

¹⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 33.

¹⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 180.

¹⁹ Renée, *Snowball* 57.

²⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 43.

²¹ Fletcher 7.

insight suggests a reading of *The Snowball Waltz* via the epistemology of the closet, where disclosures are at once “compulsory and forbidden” and the image of coming out “regularly interfaces the image of the closet.”²²

The principal closet in *The Snowball Waltz* is the dark secret of sexual knowledge. One of the characters in *The Snowball Waltz* declares what she considers to be a universal truth about small towns: “You can’t keep a secret in Porohiwi.”²³ In the writerly text the multifarious closets of the colonialist nation New Zealand are written (and can be reread) via the epistemologically charged pairings of ignorance/knowledge, secrecy/disclosure, innocence/initiation; pairings which constitute discourses of imperialist xenophobia, homophobia, racism, and misogyny.²⁴ This makes *The Snowball Waltz* a writerly exposé of (the secret of) an underlying sexual violence in Porohiwi. In classic signifying practices, deployed in the constitution of a Porohiwian hetero-masculine colonialist nationalism—war-like in its punishing manifestations—the writerly text signifies a legitimating eros for the colonialist nation New Zealand.

In 1930 New Zealand is the grip of The Depression and times are hard. The people of Porohiwi, “good and true New Zealanders that they are,”²⁵ entertain the idea that their German neighbours might have something to do with it. The first of the

²² Sedgwick, “Epistemology” 48.

²³ Renée, *Snowball* 44.

²⁴ In *S/Z*, Barthes argues that in the classic text the economy of language is usually protected by the separation of opposites which “underlie a vast symbolic structure” 17.

²⁵ Renée, *Snowball* 13.

gang rapes occurs in 1930 when, at the age of fifteen, Gertrude conceives Anna Mary Margaret Nusz in a rape perpetrated by three young Pakeha men from Porohiwi. In *The Snowball Waltz* a variety of characters read the classic text of their own subjectivities as if these were volitional subjectivities discursively constituted “on their own terms.”²⁶ This occurs in the classic constitution of a hetero-masculine colonialist sexuality, in particular in the figuration of Gertrude’s three rapists, Arthur Tubb, Francis Wright and Fred Jingle. It is Francis who conceives the plan to teach Gertrude Nusz a lesson in colonialist patriotism:

Everyone knows Germans were Hun Hogs, torturers, rapists, enemies in the Great War, and that Gertrude’s brother William was a no-hoper, a traitor to the flag, who in 1916 abandoned his rifle, bayonet, Mills-Webb equipment and gas helmet, slipped across No Man’s Land and deserted to the enemy.²⁷

William is not heard from again. Gerard is subsequently murdered in Porohiwi, his assailants remain unknown. His parents, however:

had their suspicions about who battered Gerard to death and left his body in a ditch for his father to find. The same locals who threw stones at their

²⁶ Janet Charman, “The dance that ‘no one may refuse,’” rev. of *The Snowball Waltz*, by Renée, *Evening Post* 19 Sept. 1997, comments that the characters in *The Snowball Waltz* “are introduced to us on their own terms” 5.

²⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 11.

windows, wrecked all their fences and stole their sheep when news of William's desertion got out.²⁸

Then Stephen Nusz disappears. The subsequent rape of Gertrude is planned not only to demarcate her as the enemy, but also as an opportunity for these boys to be initiated into sexual knowledge. Fred wants to please Francis because he has a sexual interest in Francis's sister Mary. It is, therefore, in Fred's interest to become Francis's accomplice in the rape of Gertrude. Fred is also acting out of the constraints placed on sexual knowledge. He has "an intense furtive desire to know what this thing with women is all about. This thing that no one except Francis ever mentions."²⁹ While Fred's motive for raping Gertrude is a "furtive desire," Arthur's apparent motive is comradeship (read: friendly intercourse) with Francis and with Fred. Arthur steals a bottle of whiskey from his father to lubricate them for the occasion.³⁰ Francis, who already possesses sexual knowledge, explains his plan for the three of them:

One to hold her legs, one her arms, the third to push her skirts over her face and muffle her screams. This last one will be Francis. He will pull off her bloomers and push himself inside her first. Fred and Arthur agree this is only fair because the whole idea came from Francis.³¹

²⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 14.

²⁹ Renée, *Snowball* 11.

³⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 11.

³¹ Renée, *Snowball* 12.

In the statement “the whole idea came from Francis,” a closeted misogynist xenophobia, signified by fraternal camaraderie, is presented as a volitional subjectivity. As Silverman points out, these are “epistemological strategies which must be seen as exceeding the agent who occupies that position.”³² In the writerly text, the rape of Gertrude signifies as a more widely constituted misogynist xenophobia. This is signified by a furtive desire discursively located in the epistemologically charged pairing ignorance/knowledge.

In *The Snowball Waltz* the signifier xenophobia is also a shifting element.³³ When Gertrude is “brought down”³⁴ on her way home from a church social, her initiation into sexual knowledge is also a potent signifier of xenophobia for her mother, Kathleen, who “worryes that they are still being punished for their name.”³⁵ The violence of Gertrude’s rape has a snowball effect when her father, Bill, thrashes her with his razor strop.³⁶ Bill’s actions signify a more generalised misogyny. When Gertrude discovers she is pregnant, she refuses her mother’s suggestion that she abort herself with the aid of a knitting needle.³⁷ This has been Kathleen’s violent solution to her own husband’s brutal sexual demands. Bill’s violent death from apoplexy shortly afterwards is a relief to them both.³⁸ The

³² Silverman 254.

³³ See Barthes, *S/Z* 17.

³⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 12.

³⁵ Renée, *Snowball* 14.

³⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 12.

³⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 13.

³⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 13.

classic text of female fragility is augmented by a writerly, or overt, deployment of the semic code where the quality by which a character is defined coincides with that character's name. This occurs when Gertrude's father's hetero-masculinised (read: violent) presence is replaced by the hetero-feminised figure of Kathleen's brother, Soft Jack Dillon, who comes to live with her and Gertrude.³⁹

In a writerly reversal of a colonialist discourse of female helplessness, the classic text of male authority is reread in a scene where Gertrude carries out a plan which enables her to support herself, her mother, uncle and daughter. This is achieved by reversing the appellation of the "good" signifiers of the symbolic order.⁴⁰

Gertrude goes to the bank where Arthur Tubb works as a clerk. She "opens her coat so he gets a good view of her swollen stomach [and demands] an initial deposit of ten shillings and a promise of weekly deposits of two shillings and sixpence."⁴¹ At Jingle's grocery store she hands Fred a list of groceries, to be delivered on the first of every month, with the account to be settled by Fred. Gertrude demands house and water-heating payments from Francis whose father, Frank Wright, is a wood and coal merchant.

In making these demands, Gertrude refuses to obey the rules—intrinsic to the maintenance of symbolic order—of self-blame, shame and secrecy, and in doing so

³⁹ Renée, *Snowball* 13.

⁴⁰ In *S/Z* Barthes points out that the symbolic field "is the place for multivalence and for reversibility [which] can be entered from any number of points, thereby making depth and secrecy problematic" 19.

⁴¹ Renée, *Snowball* 14.

achieves their reluctant co-operation.⁴² In a writerly return to the inevitably violent text of a woman's life, at the birth of Gertrude's daughter, Anna, on March the 3rd—the day of the Napier earthquake in 1931—Kathleen declares the child to be “[a] girl. God help it.”⁴³ Kathleen attributes to her granddaughter the values of inferiority and powerlessness accorded to the female colonialist subject in the context of a British hetero-Christian imperialism.

In 1940 Thomas Johnson Stone (Tom) arrives at the isolated property two miles from Porohiwi where Gertrude lives with Anna and Soft Jack Dillon. Kathleen has passed away. Tom is a pacifist and a conscientious objector who has escaped from an internment camp. He and Gertrude are strongly sexually attracted to each other. They enjoy six weeks together before he is arrested, dragged away, re-interned, and dies a month or so later of pneumonia. As a party to treason and as an alien, Gertrude is also regarded as a candidate for internment, but out of consideration for the baby, Anna, Gertrude is put on house arrest for the duration of the war. Gertrude's house arrest signifies her classic female subject position within the symbolic order of the colonialist nation at war with her paternal and maternal ancestors.

A legitimating eros for the colonialist town of Porohiwi is also contextualised in *The Snowball Waltz* in a variation on the epistemologically charged pairing innocence/initiation. A hetero-sexualised-feminine closet of romantic love is

⁴² Renée, *Snowball* 14-15.

⁴³ Renée, *Snowball* 17.

signified by the pairing fantasy/reality. In the early 1950s Gertrude's daughter, Anna, is seduced by the fantasy of romantic love, a closet of innocence she is forced out of when she becomes pregnant to an itinerant saxophonist and subsequently gives birth to twins.⁴⁴ In a writerly deployment of the semic code, which "represents the major device for thematizing persons,"⁴⁵ Anna's twins are named Memory and Souvenir, names which signify as sentimentally sardonic reminders of Anna's own lost innocence. Two days after their birth, Anna dies of a broken heart.

The twins are raised by Gertrude who, unwilling to comply with the symbolic sentimentality implicit in Anna's choice of names for the twins, renames them Souvie and Mem. Miss Graham, who is the twins' primary school principal, reads their birth names as an offence against hetero-normative propriety: "Whoever heard of names like Souvenir and Memory for nice little girls."⁴⁶ "Nice" little girls should not be marked by the dark reality of their mother's fall from sexual innocence. She renames them Susan and Margaret. In this writerly process of naming and renaming, the twins names signify, in the first instance, the closet of a hetero-sexualised-feminine fantasy of romantic love; secondly, the names are voided of their symbolically sentimental connotations; and thirdly, there is return to the signification of a hetero-normative colonialist respectability (read: innocence).

⁴⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 112.

⁴⁵ Silverman 251.

⁴⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 59.

The closet (read: fantasy) of romantic love, and its paired opposite the dark secret that is sexual knowledge is also reread, in *The Snowball Waltz*, within the context of the politics of postcolonial cultural production. In the writerly text this is signified in relation to the scarcity and/or irrelevance of available information about sexuality. In the context of what Gertrude reads as the multifarious failures of a classic education, Gertrude attempts to teach Souvie and Mem “the shallow nature of romance and to counter some of the folklore currently in vogue amongst younger Porohiwians.”⁴⁷ Gertrude rereads folklore: “[E]ven if you smoke a menthol cigarette before [sex], whether you do it standing up, whether you pray to Mary after, if you have sex without a french letter or a diaphragm, you will get pregnant.”⁴⁸ She supplies Souvie and Mem with Health Department pamphlets on sex and contraception, and quizzes them on the information they contain. Gertrude also bans Mills & Boon novels and other “love comics.”⁴⁹ In *The Snowball Waltz*, folklore and romance novels signify the closet of innocence, which Gertrude opens with sexual disclosures via the, albeit, limited means available to her.

Gertrude also tells the twins about the xenophobic rape which led to their mother’s conception. The re-education of Souvie and Mem, thus, includes a rereading of the colonialist text (read: closet) of race. This is signified when Gertrude points out “the trouble the [Nusz] name has brought to them all.”⁵⁰ In

⁴⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 129.

⁴⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 129.

⁴⁹ Renée, *Snowball* 129.

⁵⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 18.

the writerly text, race signifies as a discursive constituent of rape. The closet of race is also signified in *The Snowball Waltz*, when, for example, Souvie and Mem arrive home from school one day, crying because the other children had “called out Achtung and Heil Hitler, put their first fingers across their top lip, their right arms sharply out front, and marched behind [them] all the way home.”⁵¹

Souvie notices that she and Mem didn’t receive invitations “to birthday parties to which every other Pakeha in the class had been invited ... If the Maori kids weren’t invited, neither were Souvie and Mem. There’s a lesson there, but I don’t know what it is, thinks Souvie.”⁵² As a child, Souvie does not yet comprehend that the way racism towards her family is configured within a legislative and cultural politics of biculturalism, where Maori and Pakeha are considered to be equal partners to the Treaty of Waitangi and to be other than Maori or Pakeha (read: Anglo-Celt) in Aotearoa New Zealand in the late twentieth-century is to be subject to the anatomy of prejudice whereby a raced-difference constitutes one as an alien insider.⁵³

⁵¹ Renée, *Snowball* 59.

⁵² Renée, *Snowball* 109.

⁵³ Biculturalism has been a contested feature of legislative and cultural politics of this nation since the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 whereby Maori and Pakeha accepted partnership rights and responsibilities. A legislative and cultural politics of biculturalism includes initiatives to enact and enforce the principles of The Treaty of Waitangi. The meaning of these principles and hence the meaning of partnership rights and responsibilities is subject to ongoing debate. See also Sneja Gunew, “Denaturalizing cultural nationalisms,” Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, where she points out that in an Australian discourse of multiculturalism “Anglo-Celts are not included” 111.

Souvie and Mem signify yet another aspect of the discursive constitution of classic colonialist subjectivity. In a context in which christianity functions as a dominant cultural code it can be expected that both settings and characters will be constituted via (at least) the symbolic opposition good/evil.⁵⁴ In *The Snowball Waltz* this opposition is delineated in the characters of Souvie and Mem who “grew up enduring The Looks.”⁵⁵ “The Looks” connote a variety of myths associated with twins.⁵⁶ Souvie tells her friend, Lydia, the myth that a mother of twins “must have had intercourse with two men, one of whom was the devil.”⁵⁷ Souvie also recalls the twinned aspects of good and evil written into the classic texts of their childhood via the figures of Romulus and Remus, Jacob and Esau, Viola and Sebastian, Doctor Jeckyll and Mr Hyde, Ronald and Reginald Kray, Dorian Gray, the Man in the Iron Mask.⁵⁸ The symbolic code, signified by “The Looks,” is the wake of what has already been written and already been read in these classic texts of good and evil.

Silverman points out that the writerly project “involves a relentless pursuit of new signifieds—a ceaseless slippage from one connotation to another.”⁵⁹ In *The Snowball Waltz* a legitimating eros for the colonialist nation is configured not only in relation to a hetero-masculinised xenophobia, but also in relation to an

⁵⁴ See Silverman 255.

⁵⁵ Renée, *Snowball* 64.

⁵⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 65.

⁵⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 65.

⁵⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 65.

⁵⁹ Silverman 256.

institutionalised homophobia. As a young adult, Souvie marries Hugh Wright, aka Hug, who is a court reporter for the *Porohiwi Times* and a free-lance writer for the Sunday papers. Souvie works in the *Mexicali Rose* as a waitress. When some years later Souvie falls in love with Resa Urney, a local schoolteacher, Mem tells Souvie she is “[r]epellant, repugnant, revolting,”⁶⁰ and insists that Souvie does not “come near my kids, I don’t want them contaminated!”⁶¹ Souvie’s rejoinder to Mem is to call her a “[r]edneck, bigot, homophobic.”⁶² She tells Mem: “Piss off then and take your bloody kids with you!”⁶³ Mem’s husband, Marty Wright, has his say as well: “You realise that if you go off with that dyke you’ll never see your sister again?”⁶⁴ A homophobic, hetero-colonialist reading of lesbian subjectivity condemns Souvie to exile from her family.

Souvie’s and Resa’s sexual relationship is also configured via the epistemologically charged pairing good/evil via the structure of the hetero-christian closet of the Confessional. This writerly reconfiguration of the narrative structure of the closet occurs in the context of Souvie’s and Resa’s (discursive) encounters with the three Catholic priests, Father Jensen, Father McGuire and Father Pedersen. Resa, born and raised a Catholic, has difficulty reconciling her religious upbringing with her transgressive (read: evil) lesbian sexuality. The

⁶⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 117.

⁶¹ Renée, *Snowball* 117.

⁶² Renée, *Snowball* 117.

⁶³ Renée, *Snowball* 117.

⁶⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 118.

classic text of a homophobic hetero-christianity is signified in *The Snowball Waltz*, via the epistemologically charged pairing living hell/suicide.⁶⁵

A reading of the classic text of hetero-christianity occurs when Father McGuire goes down on his knees in the *Mexicali Rose* to pray for Resa: “You’re committing a most terrible sin. God will not be mocked If you turn your back on the church it will turn its back on you! Unless you call a halt to this iniquity your soul will be consigned to eternal damnation.”⁶⁶ The threat of eternal damnation connotes, for Resa, a living hell. In an attempt to escape their persecutors, Souvie and Resa run away together. They go to London which signifies, paradoxically, as the very heart of the British Empire. Their relocation into the heart (read: symbolic economy) of the hetero-christian Empire consolidates a diasporic lesbian experience.

Souvie and Resa live in London for six years before Resa commits suicide. In the scenarios which take place just prior to, and just after Resa’s suicide, the writerly text repeatedly signifies the symbolic codes constitutive of a hetero-normative christianity. The oppositions which constitute Resa’s living hell/suicide are

⁶⁵ There are a number of suicides in *The Snowball Waltz*. They are Resa, Resa’s school pupil Elsa, Resa’s friend Lydia’s father, the customs officer’s brother, and, possibly also the unidentified victim of a Porohiwan gang rape. Gertrude also considers suicide an option for herself: “She’ll take steps. Stones in her pocket” 26. For a perspective on suicide by young New Zealand lesbians see Sallie Greenwood, “I Can’t Work This Out ... I’m At A Dead End,” Masters Thesis, University of Waikato, Hamilton, 1996.

⁶⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 118-19. A local forum on the question of the incompatibility of catholicism and lesbianism was offered by “ASCENT, a catholic-based (with ecumenical membership) gay/lesbian group” *Otago Daily Times* 2: 16. See also “Christian conference on sexism and heterosexism,” *Bilines* Sept. 1992: 1. See also Felix Donnelly, “The Scriptures and Homosexuality,” *New Zealand Gay News* July/Aug. 1975: 26-29. This is Father Felix Donnelly’s submission to a New Zealand government select committee on the Crimes Amendment Bill to legalise homosexuality.

contextualised in the burden of guilt Resa is expected to bear for the suicide of her pupil, Elsa, who had had to cope with poverty, three younger siblings and a grieving father after her mother had been admitted to a mental hospital. Elsa had talked about nothing else to Resa, who had considered that Elsa's problems would eventually pass. When time proves not to be a solution and Elsa hangs herself, Resa is guilt-ridden. Souvie locates the source of Resa's guilt in Father Pederson who "said the reason she'd been so blind was that she'd drifted away from the church and therefore closed off those kinds of antennae."⁶⁷ Resa's being "closed off" signifies her temporary refusal of the signifying imperatives of a hetero-christian sexuality.

Father Pederson's emotional blackmail snowballs when Resa in turn blackmails Souvie: "I will kill myself if you don't come to confession, to Mass, if you don't admit we are committing a sin, promise never to do it again, stay away from those who encourage us to offend."⁶⁸ To assuage her own guilt, Resa ends their sexual relationship. Father Pederson works on Souvie's guilt as well:

I know you love each other and I applaud that. Love is not easy to come by in this world. But it shouldn't be confused with the love between a man and a woman. That shows confusion, and confusion leads to what I call, by the old-fashioned word, sin.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 84.

⁶⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 99.

⁶⁹ Renée, *Snowball* 85.

It becomes clear to Souvie that, for her own survival, she must not submit to Resa's conviction that their love is evil. At times Souvie's resolve flags due to the snowballing effect of compounding guilt: "Maybe it would be easier just to give in."⁷⁰ Souvie "thinks of her [own] desperation when she realised she'd fallen in love with Resa, [and] her attempts to stop it."⁷¹ Souvie's earlier attempts to deny her love for Resa included the self-inflicted punishments of "Cold baths ... Housework ... Hard labour." Things "that had worked before."⁷² The connotations of cold baths, housework and hard labour signify as antidotes for the sexually, domestically, and socially maladjusted.

Unable to withstand the relentless punishment of a living hell, Resa had subsequently "swallowed a large number of sleeping pills, lain down on the bed and pulled a plastic bag over her head."⁷³ Resa's Catholic family's,

bruising agony is tinged with inadmissible, unmentionable relief there can be no more shame or embarrassment. Tragic as it is their darling Resa died safe. Father heard her confession the very afternoon of the night she swallowed all those pills.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 81.

⁷¹ Renée, *Snowball* 65.

⁷² Renée, *Snowball* 65-66.

⁷³ Renée, *Snowball* 34.

⁷⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 40.

When one of the partners of a lesbian couple dies, signifiers of the normative constitution of the hetero-Christian family abound. Christian absolution redeems Resa. Now that she is dead, Resa's guilt is reassigned to Souvie. Souvie is not welcome at the memorial service and her presence is ignored by Resa's family. People who are strangers to Souvie carry Resa's coffin. A few days after the funeral Father Pedersen accompanies Resa's family who come to Resa's and Souvie's flat to collect Resa's personal possessions. In a symbolic act of queer revenge Souvie has already attacked Resa's rosary beads with a hammer.⁷⁵ She decides that, she, Souvie Nusz,

is going to face these people and they have to face [the] woman they despise to pick up [Resa's] detritus they refused to set eyes on when Resa was alive. All of them hated what she was and made no secret of it. Communication had been non-existent for the last ten years. Nothing at Christmas or birthdays. Now she's dead, here they are with their cases and cartons.⁷⁶

Souvie's reference to "detritus" signifies Resa's value in a hetero-Christian symbolic economy. When her family leaves the flat with Resa's possessions, Souvie runs after them. In a refusal of the signifying imperatives of a hetero-Christian (read: homophobic) symbolic economy, where communication with Resa

⁷⁵ Renée, *Snowball* 55.

⁷⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 61-62.

posed the threat of their own ex-communication, she shouts to their departing figures: "I'm here! I'm bloody here. Look at me! I'm here!"⁷⁷

The widespread practice of suicide is signified on Souvie's return to New Zealand. At Auckland Airport the Custom's Officer who inspects Souvie's belongings comes across the newspaper-cutting announcing Resa's suicide. Her reaction is immediate and direct: "My brother did that. Why do people do that? ... I do this all the time as if I sense it, you know? ... You're the eighth one I've stopped in the last two months. It's as though I sense something."⁷⁸ The Customs Officer's questions signify her intuition about suicide, an imminent explanation for which lies in her reference to own brother's "friend,"⁷⁹ which suggests that difficult circumstances surrounding a homosexual relationship might underlie his suicide.

Resa committed suicide in her and Souvie's bed, the same bed "where they made love, talked about previous lives, made plans, discussed books, films, fought, made up, laughed, hugged close, [and, Souvie believed, Resa] felt safe, secure."⁸⁰ Resa's suicide in their bed leaves Souvie confused, distressed, and in her own living hell, a hell where Resa's continued presence takes the form of a floating green head covered in the plastic bag in which she suffocated. The green head tells Souvie: "You know why I did it. What we were was evil."⁸¹ Souvie considers this

⁷⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 63.

⁷⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 107-8.

⁷⁹ Renée, *Snowball* 108.

⁸⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 81.

⁸¹ Renée, *Snowball* 107.

to be a “post-mortem blackmail”⁸² The struggle for power is a struggle between good and evil, the writerly good being constituted in Souvie’s refusal to submit to the hetero-christian (read: homophobic) text of her lesbian sexuality. It is back in New Zealand that Gertrude offers Souvie a solution to the problem of Resa’s continued presence. Gertrude agrees to sever Resa’s head from its evil attachment to Souvie by chopping it off on the wood block.⁸³ In this act of self-redemption Souvie defies Resa’s demand that she submit to the codes of christian orthodoxy. Souvie is returned to a self not fragmented by guilt of the would-be dark secret of her lesbian sexuality in a hetero-colonialist christian context.

The colonialist nation is signified in my reading of *The Snowball Waltz* thus far, by an institutionalised heterosexuality, xenophobic racism, and misogyny. It is also signified as an institutionalised ageism. Gertrude has for over sixty years operated a small business consisting of a plant nursery and apiary. Now, in 1995, New Zealand is in the grip of New Right political philosophies of voluntary unionism, individual employment contracts, and decreased state welfare responsibility. Gertrude articulates her own value as an old woman in a crumbling welfare state. She has observed that when the worker bees can no longer work, “there is no compassion, no pension, no reward for past hard labour.”⁸⁴ Most of what Gertrude reads “tells her she’s a drain on the national health system, a greedy old devil who’s outlived her time.”⁸⁵ Like the queen bee she’ll be “kicked out for

⁸² Renée, *Snowball* 37.

⁸³ Renée, *Snowball* 175.

⁸⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 22.

⁸⁵ Renée, *Snowball* 26.

being too old and past it.”⁸⁶ When Gertrude is asked why she stays in Porohiwi she replies: “Where would I go that would be any different?”⁸⁷

In a refusal of the so-called benefits of a liberal democracy, Gertrude eschews a number of forms of national protection. Gertrude does not apply for the state pension, “because she’s not having her name on their fancy computers. Give those buggers an inch and they’ll take a mile.”⁸⁸ Her prior experiences of nationalist violence give her insight into the counter-signification of the terms national and health. She comments wryly: “National health. Now there’s an oxymoron.”⁸⁹ Gertrude’s dismissal of the so-called benefits of national protection extend to her refusal, in the face of the pressures being put upon her by Marty Wright and Affy Jingle, to relinquish her land. Gertrude expresses her independence thus: “She’s damned if she’ll let them sell up and put her in a Home.”⁹⁰ In this context Home signifies the institutionalisation of hetero-state racism, misogyny and ageist terrorism. Despite Gertrude’s resistance, Affy Jingle—who owns land next to Gertrude in North Porohiwi—embarks on a campaign of anonymous harassment in an attempt to terrorise her off her land. He spies on her from a vantage point in his macrocarpa hedge taking note of her routines. In an outburst of misogynist and ageist abuse, Affy refers to Gertrude as “the old bitch,”⁹¹ and “the old fucker.”⁹²

⁸⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 22-23.

⁸⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 26.

⁸⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 26.

⁸⁹ Renée, *Snowball* 26.

⁹⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 26.

⁹¹ Renée, *Snowball* 70.

Affy Jingle sees himself as supported by his fellow Porohiwians in his xenophobic (read: racist) attitude towards her: “As though anyone would want a bloody old Nazi for a neighbour.”⁹³ As anyone’s representative, Affy sends Gertrude an anonymous letter: “BLOODY OLD NAZI ... GET OUT OF POROHIWI OR YOU’LL BE SORRY.”⁹⁴ Affy justifies his actions in his belief that Gertrude should read the signs of her enemy status and act accordingly. He spray-paints a large black swastika on the front of Gertrude’s house,⁹⁵ and vandalises her nursery shed,⁹⁶ actions which he considers “serve[s] the old cunt right.”⁹⁷ His invective is simultaneously xenophobic, misogynist and ageist.

Gertrude does read the signs of a xenophobic, ageist misogyny. She considers him to be “Trouble with a capital T ... remembering briefly another night, another time, another Jingle.”⁹⁸ She is referring to the rapist Fred Jingle, who is Affy’s uncle. On one occasion when she discovers Affy, who is wearing a balaclava,⁹⁹ lurking on her property he rushes at her and knocks her over causing bruising to her eye and face and injury to her ankle.¹⁰⁰ It is consistent with Gertrude’s understanding

⁹² Renée, *Snowball* 82.

⁹³ Renée, *Snowball* 70.

⁹⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 95.

⁹⁵ Renée, *Snowball* 123.

⁹⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 131.

⁹⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 36.

⁹⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 33.

⁹⁹ A balaclava is a head and face covering which has apertures for the eyes and mouth.

¹⁰⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 34.

of the signs and consequences of a generalised ageist misogyny—which also signifies the threat of state institutionalisation in a Home—that she does not report Affy’s assault to the police.

Affy’s abuse is not reserved for Gertrude alone. His sister, Joyce, recalls his sudden and vicious temper which she experienced in their childhood, for example, “the time mum’s old cat was found with its throat cut.”¹⁰¹ She thinks that Affy’s temper is a “bit like Ruapehu [you never] knew where the fallout would end up.”¹⁰² When Joyce confronts him he commands: “Piss off and take your fat arse with you! ... Fuck you then, you fat slag.”¹⁰³ Affy also remembers when “[h]e gave [his wife] Elaine a piece of his mind ... if she’d just kept quiet instead of arguing, things would probably have been all right. He’d always had a short fuse.”¹⁰⁴ He suspects that Gertrude was responsible for encouraging Elaine to leave him, after he had beaten her once too often. His rage is coupled with his sexual impotence: Elaine had “pulled away when he wanted to cuddle up the night before. Said she was tired. Oh he talked her round, but then it bloody happened, it bloody happened. Been happening a lot lately.”¹⁰⁵ Repeated occurrences of sexual impotence inflame Affy’s frustrations. Eventually he causes Elaine’s death in a car crash. In a classic articulation of the epistemology of the closet—signified in the paired opposites of innocence/guilt—Affy Jingle’s golden rule is: “You’re only

¹⁰¹ Renée, *Snowball* 132.

¹⁰² Renée, *Snowball* 132.

¹⁰³ Renée, *Snowball* 136.

¹⁰⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 82-83.

¹⁰⁵ Renée, *Snowball* 83.

guilty if you get found out.”¹⁰⁶ In a final bid to take over Gertrude’s land, and to dispatch a hetero-colonialist (read: masculinist) nationalist justice, he sets fire to her bee hives and, inadvertently, to himself.¹⁰⁷

The constitution of a hetero-colonialist (read: violent) masculinist nationalism in Porohiwi is queered in *The Snowball Waltz* by the figures of Soft Jack Dillon and Thomas Johnson Stone. A writerly rereading of the colonialist text of hetero-masculinity also takes place via the figure of Daniel Porohiwi. In 1995 Daniel Porohiwi makes his first appearance in Porohiwi. It transpires that he is a business consultant who works on Treaty claims and negotiations, and is the son of Stephen Nusz who disappeared in 1916. Daniel explains that his father married Lovey Porohiwi in Rotorua in the 1920s, had taken her name and become known as Tipene Porohiwi. By taking his wife’s family name, which protects him from “the trouble” that his own name has caused his family, Stephen also relinquished the colonialist privileges associated with signifiers of a patriarchal Pakeha lineage. He did, however, acquire a Maori whakapapa for his son in the process. Daniel Porohiwi, of German/Irish and Maori descent, is expected by his Maori family/whanau, in particular by his grandfather Apirana Porohiwi (aka Api and Koro), to marry the woman his Maori whakapapa designates as his most appropriate mate. This is Charlotte Porohiwi, a local nurse.¹⁰⁸ Their “whakapapa lines cross in just the right places.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 36.

¹⁰⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 175-78.

¹⁰⁸ Charlotte Porohiwi is the namesake of Charlotte Porohiwi in *Daisy and Lily*.

¹⁰⁹ Renée, *Snowball* 45.

Charlotte was previously married to Andrew James, with whom she had the twins Rangi and Rana James. Charlotte contends that their break up had “[n]othing to do with the fact that she’s Maori and Andrew Pakeha, more to do with him going off sex or at least with Charlotte. She didn’t know whether it was because he had a lover or paid visits to the Passion Palace.”¹¹⁰ In *The Snowball Waltz* the constitution of a legitimating (read: justifiable) eros for the colonialist (read: Pakeha) nation is signified by the imperialist connotations of the Passion Palace. Charlotte’s sisters and aunts read an imperialist sexual ethos into Andrew’s sexual proclivities when they put the cause of the marriage break down to “the Maori Pakeha thing, no doubt about it.”¹¹¹

Charlotte describes the handsome and eligible Daniel as “GQ material.”¹¹² She implies that an imperialist eros is operating in her own family when she comments that the way they are behaving, “you’d think he was the Prince of Wales!”¹¹³ At a more personal level she is reluctant to marry a second time “simply to make babies to fulfil other people’s dreams.”¹¹⁴ She calls on the spirit of her Nanny Sophie to intervene. With the subsequent revelation of Daniel’s homosexuality,

¹¹⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 42.

¹¹¹ Renée, *Snowball* 43.

¹¹² Renée, *Snowball* 92. *GQ* is the fashion magazine *Gentleman's Quarterly*.

¹¹³ Renée, *Snowball* 45.

¹¹⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 92.

Charlotte's personal worries "as though borne on the back of a huge bird, fly out the window."¹¹⁵

In *The Snowball Waltz* a Maori lineage, or whakapapa line, connotes queerly when Daniel asks Gertrude: "Are there any other homosexuals in the family?"¹¹⁶ In this reconfigured whakapapa, Souvie becomes both whanau and queer family. The Porohiwi-Nusz family configuration also signifies queerly for Gertrude's great-grandson, Mark, who refers to Daniel as his "long lost cousin [o]r something."¹¹⁷ Mark puts the unnamed "something" down to it being "[w]eird. Families are weird."¹¹⁸ Mem, Gertrude's granddaughter and Mark's mother, reconsiders her own "calm acceptance, almost relief" at hearing the news of the family connection with Daniel Porohiwi.¹¹⁹ She describes it as: "Like finding a piece of a jig-saw she didn't know had been lost."¹²⁰ In so far as the writerly project involves "a ceaseless slippage from one connotation to another,"¹²¹ the writerly text slips from connotations of anonymity and loss, to connotations of retrieval and gain when Daniel Porohiwi refers to Gertrude as "Kuia,"¹²² and again when Api

¹¹⁵ Renée, *Snowball* 92.

¹¹⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 95.

¹¹⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 157.

¹¹⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 157.

¹¹⁹ Renée, *Snowball* 77.

¹²⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 77.

¹²¹ Silverman 256.

¹²² Renée, *Snowball* 139.

presents her with a carved stick.¹²³ Their co-conferral of high status on Gertrude, queers the bicultural text which accords privilege to Pakeha (read: Anglo-Celt) over non Anglo-Celt tauiwi.

The constitution of a hetero-colonialist (read: violent) masculinism in Porohiwi, queered by the figures of Soft Jack Dillon, Thomas Johnson Stone and Daniel Porohiwi, also occurs in the figure Ollie Jingle. Ollie Jingle grows orchids for pleasure. His brother Affy is not surprised that Ollie's wife, Rosemary, is having an affair considering "the way Ollie hung around his orchids all the time."¹²⁴ Ollie is, in Affy's eyes, "weak."¹²⁵ Affy thinks of a solution to Ollie's problem: "if she was Affy's wife he'd teach her a thing or two."¹²⁶ Affy's violent temper signifies in opposition to Ollie's quiet contemplation. Ollie considers:

There's many Porohiwis It all depends on which one you live in and whether your Porohiwi overlaps with others You have to admit that most of the time one lot doesn't know the other exists until they come up against another Porohiwi all by themselves.¹²⁷

¹²³ Renée, *Snowball* 182.

¹²⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 71.

¹²⁵ Renée, *Snowball* 70.

¹²⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 71.

¹²⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 113.

The many overlapping Porohiwis to which Ollie refers, signify the multifarious discourses which constitute the emerging postcolonial (read: queer) nation Aotearoa New Zealand.

The queer text of the postcolonial nation is further signified in the figure of Vincent Dix. Vincent and Chrystal Dix are one-time owners of the local café *The Mexicali Rose*. They are a hetero-couple queered by their age difference—Chrystal is the elder by at least ten years—and by Vincent’s utter adoration of his wife. In a way which signifies in opposition to the colonialist text of a generalised misogyny, Vincent “smiles at Chrystal as though she’s so special he can’t believe she’s actually there with him.”¹²⁸ They lie in the “queen-sized bed” and talk.¹²⁹ Chrystal tells Vincent—who is the newly elected president of the Porohiwi Players who are putting on a pageant to celebrate the 50th anniversary of VE Day—that she admires and respects him for making a stand over the issues confronting the production. For Vincent, “[i]t’s like winning an Oscar unexpectedly. [He] feels a rush of joy, tears, spring, he swallows. Why the hell should he cry because his wife tells him she respects him?”¹³⁰ In the writerly text, smiles, talking and tears are signifiers of a masculine softness which signify (negatively) in opposition to the (positive) connotations of hardness in a hetero-colonialist text of masculinity.

¹²⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 147.

¹²⁹ Renée, *Snowball* 86.

¹³⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 86.

The positive connotations of masculine hardness signify negatively in relation to the colonialist text of lesbian subjectivity. This occurs in Affy Jingle's assessment of Doctor Harriet Truelove as a "[h]ard-looking bitch."¹³¹ Doctor Harriet Truelove and Souvie went to the same high school. They meet up at Porohiwi Airport over thirty years later. Souvie suspects that Harriet might now be a lesbian. She asks herself: "Saints don't turn into dykes. Do they?"¹³² Souvie's question signifies in reverse to the christian path of redemption. She asks herself: "Is she or isn't she? There's something, a blind woman can see that."¹³³ What that "something"—which signifies as a threat to Affy Jingle—might be, is yet to make itself apparent to Souvie.

The constitution of a hetero-masculine colonialist nationalism is augmented in *The Snowball Waltz* in the context of the 1995 celebrations of the 50th anniversary of VE Day. Gertrude chooses not to be present when the mayor of Porohiwi makes a public speech where he refers to:

the depths of Porohiwian community feelings [and] thanks all who fought to make this land a better place and is very proud and pleased to present Mr Arthur Tubb, a contemporary and army mate of Mr Fred Jingle and other brave boys who didn't come back.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Renée, *Snowball* 71.

¹³² Renée, *Snowball* 116.

¹³³ Renée, *Snowball* 119.

¹³⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 180.

When Gertrude reads the mayor's speech in that night's *Times* she wonders if Arthur Tubb "ever thinks about one crisp cloudy evening in another May."¹³⁵ In the context of her rape, Gertrude rereads the nationalist signifiers of bravery as signifiers of a xenophobic personal cowardice. She then reads the letters to the editor of the *Times* which give voice to a community outburst of xenophobia:

We don't want any Germans, whether they live in Porohiwi or not, at the VE Day ceremonies. They are responsible for the deaths of hundreds of our brave boys All right-thinking New Zealanders will be appalled at the idea that local Germans have threatened to gate-crash the ceremonies of remembrance. This is just the sort of attitude that sent six million Jews to their death ... True-blue New Zealanders won't stand for it.¹³⁶

True-blue, right-thinking New Zealanders are represented by one member of the community who signs the letter "Patriot."¹³⁷ Souvie questions the policy of the *Porohiwi Times*' acceptance of unsigned letters,¹³⁸ which, in the writerly text, signifies the protected anonymity of the rapists.

In *The Snowball Waltz*, the gang rape of Gertrude is textualised as *rite de passage* into Porohiwian hetero-racist masculinity. The second gang rape is witnessed by

¹³⁵ Renée, *Snowball* 180.

¹³⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 96.

¹³⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 150.

¹³⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 150-51.

Gertrude's great-grandson, Mark. This gang rape is also premeditated, its time and place of execution communicated to Mark by his friend Shane. Shane responds to Mark's hesitation about going: "Please yourself ... Don't think I care. It's going to happen whether we're there or not."¹³⁹ Persuaded by a discourse of inevitability—the already read, the already written text of hetero-masculinity—Mark joins a small group of young men who are drinking beer. When they hear the others coming they hide in the sand dunes. From this vantage-ground Mark "hears laughter, then talk, then more laughter. They've been drinking, that's clear. He doesn't see the girl at first. Then he sees a figure being pushed along, staggering on her knees, hauled up, pushed."¹⁴⁰ Later he recalls:

[I]mages of shadowed faces, voices urging others on, beer cans being passed around, the gasps, cheers, those horrible, horrible sounds he would never forget, the girl's scream, quickly shut off. Running away at last, being sick. Someone laughing.¹⁴¹

Mark is able to recognise at least one of the rapists as Affy Jingle. Mark's complicity in the rape weighs heavily on his conscience. He doesn't understand why he stood by and did nothing, "why he remained watching, why the hell he stayed."¹⁴² He has fears for his own safety as Affy Jingle is subsequently

¹³⁹ Renée, *Snowball* 77.

¹⁴⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 78.

¹⁴¹ Renée, *Snowball* 24.

¹⁴² Renée, *Snowball* 24.

blackmailing him into silence: “You needn’t worry. I won’t say anything. Not if you play your cards rights, know what I mean?”¹⁴³

Mark’s conscious fear increases for the women of the community in general, and for his mother, Mem, who often walks alone at night, in particular. He experiences a “terrible unease, an anxiety he feels every time he looks at Mem or the girls at school, women on the street.”¹⁴⁴ His fears are soon realised when his sister, Joanna, is accosted and injured outside the convent by the balaclava-clad figure of Affy Jingle who escapes unrecognized.¹⁴⁵ Sometime later when Mark sees a figure sitting alone on the beach he thinks it must be the victim of the rape he witnessed. Then the *Porohiwi Times* publishes a story about a young Maori woman, headlined with the details: “Body Washed Up On Beach. Missing Girl Drowned. A terrible tragedy, say grieving relatives.”¹⁴⁶ Her true fate remains a Porohiwian secret.

Mark’s initiation into Porohiwian hetero-racist masculinist allegiance in the unpublished war against women, leaves him distressed and confused. His mother, Mem, suspects that there is something wrong but she doesn’t know how to make “a sixteen year-old boy talk to you if he doesn’t want to.”¹⁴⁷ Marty says “all

¹⁴³ Renée, *Snowball* 123.

¹⁴⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 158.

¹⁴⁵ Renée, *Snowball* 173.

¹⁴⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 157.

¹⁴⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 74.

growing boys keep secrets from their mothers.”¹⁴⁸ Mark searches his mind for the right person to tell about the rape. Mark decides on Father Jensen knowing this is “the one person in the whole world he could tell and be sure he wouldn’t tell anyone.”¹⁴⁹ The safety of Marks’ secret lies not only in the ritual constitution of a hetero-racist masculinity, but also in the structure of the closet of the christian Confessional.

In the writerly text, Porohiwi’s violent history is also signified in relationship to the politics of contemporary postcolonial cultural production. In this context cultural violence is signified in colonialist discourses of patriotism, xenophobia, racism and homophobia. Souvie reads coercion and shame as signifiers of a hetero-racist, patriotic and homophobic conformity when she describes Porohiwi High School: “Like most schools it was run on the wheels of intimidation, humiliation and setting up one kid against another.”¹⁵⁰ The writerly text reads an alternative signifying practice. Souvie’s sister, Mem, teaches at Porohiwi High. Mem’s bicultural teaching methods baffle her colleagues when, for example, she allows her class to act out *Romeo and Juliet* by dividing them into the local tribal groups of Ngati Kahungunu and Ngati Porou. In doing so,

[Mem] includes the possibility of cousins, aunties and uncles on either side, so that the kids are forced into a glimmering of the complexities

¹⁴⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 74.

¹⁴⁹ Renée, *Snowball* 160.

¹⁵⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 63.

inherent in tribal and family conflict. They draw up imaginary whakapapa, a history of former slights and feuds, appoint a Romeo (Rangi) from Ngati Kahungunu and a Juliet (Hineawa) from Ngati Porou.¹⁵¹

In the writerly text, Mem's bicultural success signifies in opposition to the tokenism deployed in recruiting Maori singers for the Porohiwi Players, the local theatrical group who are putting on a pageant as part of the 1995 VE Day memorial celebration. The pageant is nostalgically titled *Blue Smoke*, the hero and narrator of which is a character based on, and called, Fred Jingle.¹⁵² Mem suggests that they have two narrators, perhaps a Porohiwi to represent those Porohiwis who went to war with the Maori Battalion.¹⁵³ Her daughter, Joanna, considers this "causing trouble."¹⁵⁴ Ollie Jingle confronts his wife, Rosemary, who is also involved in the pageant, over the issue of the narrators. Rosemary's response is to suggest that,

Mem's just going overboard. There's no need for it. I'm sure they don't expect to have a narrator of their own ... We put an ad in the paper inviting anyone ... If Charlotte had been keen on her people being represented she'd have turned up.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Renée, *Snowball* 148-49.

¹⁵² Renée, *Snowball* 50.

¹⁵³ The Maori Battalion was deployed as a specialist unit in the Allied forces in World War Two.

¹⁵⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 73.

¹⁵⁵ Renée, *Snowball* 87.

Rosemary's suggestion that Mem was going overboard, when "anyone" had already been invited, is a writerly articulation of lip-service frequently paid to issues of biculturalism in the colonialist nation New Zealand.

In a rereading of the classic text of war-time heroes, *Blue Smoke* is smoke-screen for a generalised xenophobia which surfaces in the context of war remembrance. This gives Affy a public forum for his personal vendettas. When Mem's daughter, Joanna, auditions for the pageant, someone in the audience calls out "Heil Hitler!" and, "you shouldn't be auditioning Germans!"¹⁵⁶ Affy Jingle blocks the exit as Joanna tries to leave and hisses at her, "I'll get you bitch."¹⁵⁷ In the waiting room at the doctor's surgery, the talk turns to the VE Day ceremonies. Someone remarks: "They tell me Gertrude Nusz is trying to take over at the theatre?"¹⁵⁸ A returned serviceman offers his opinion: "Tell you this ... I didn't fight at El Alamein to lie down and let that old bag interfere with the anniversary."¹⁵⁹ The returned serviceman signifies that the war in which he fought was a battle won for the right to retain his privileged position in the symbolic economy of the colonialist (read: xenophobic) nation. In his self-appointed role as moral arbiter for the xenophobic community of Porohiwi, Affy considers it "a bit of a bonus this thing with the Players."¹⁶⁰ Incited and encouraged by xenophobic community support, Affy Jingle articulates a hetero-masculine patriotic nationalism when he

¹⁵⁶ Renée, *Snowball* 103.

¹⁵⁷ Renée, *Snowball* 104.

¹⁵⁸ Renée, *Snowball* 141.

¹⁵⁹ Renée, *Snowball* 142.

¹⁶⁰ Renée, *Snowball* 81.

joins the protest against the suggested changes to the Porohiwi Players pageant: “They died to save people like you! ... Don’t insult our war dead! ... Don’t mock their sacrifice!”¹⁶¹

When the piano player, Lois McCutcheon, ventures to ask what is “all this rubbishy talk about Germans?,” Preston, the community theatre director and stage manager, leaps to his own defence: “Don’t look at me. I didn’t start it.”¹⁶² While Preston mulls over the question of where this talk might have begun, it is Lois who decides to act: “Well, I intend to finish it.”¹⁶³ She does so by suggesting changes which include having three narrators, Fred Jingle’s representative, Joanna Wright, and someone nominated by Charlotte Porohiwi.¹⁶⁴ Charlotte subsequently nominates Daniel. This reconfiguration of Porohiwian representatives signifies a writerly reading of Porohiwian history.

As a rereading of the classic text of the colonialist nation, *The Snowball Waltz* is characterised not by a structure of signifieds, but rather by “a galaxy of signifiers.”¹⁶⁵ A galaxy of signifiers of the cultural and symbolic codes of the colonialist nation converge as a rereading of the classic (read: hetero-imperialist, masculinised-homophobic christian) text of the British Empire. A legitimating eros for the colonialist nation is signified as a hetero-fraternal, patriotic, nationalist

¹⁶¹ Renée, *Snowball* 78.

¹⁶² Renée, *Snowball* 155.

¹⁶³ Renée, *Snowball* 155.

¹⁶⁴ Renée, *Snowball* 156.

¹⁶⁵ Barthes, *S/Z* 5.

sexuality. Women signify, in times of national economic recession, as the nation's internal enemy, contextualised in the gang rape of Gertrude in 1930, and in the gang rape and possibly the murder of the unnamed Maori woman in 1995.

The Snowball Waltz is a writerly reading of the multifarious closets of homophobia, xenophobia, racism, and misogyny signified via the epistemologically charged pairings knowledge/ignorance, innocence/initiation and secrecy/disclosure. In a writerly deployment of the semic code in *The Snowball Waltz*, the RSA, the Salvation Army and the Passion Palace are also connotative signifiers of a British textual (read: sexual) imperialism operating in late twentieth century colonialist New Zealand.

Like the three novels which preceded it, *The Snowball Waltz* is richly and densely populated. Reviewer Fletcher considers: "We are all one-time residents of Porohiwi whether we admit it to ourselves or not."¹⁶⁶ In *The Snowball Waltz* the small town of Porohiwi signifies the emerging postcolonial (read: queer) nation Aotearoa New Zealand. In the writerly exposure of the "deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption," the text of lesbian subjectivity emerges in the process of queerly reconstituting the colonialist nation New Zealand.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Fletcher 7.

¹⁶⁷ Sedgwick, "Epistemology" 48.

CONCLUSION

Castle asks: “What is a lesbian fiction?”¹ According to “what we might call the ‘Queen Victoria Principle’ of cultural analysis,” Castle continues, “no such entity, of course, should even exist.”² Why? “When it comes to lesbians ... many people have trouble seeing what’s in front of them.”³ The “Queen Victoria principle” highlights the problem of reading a New Zealand lesbian fiction. This problem became obvious when *Willy Nilly* was published in 1990 and the so-called New Zealand literati showed themselves to be unprepared for reading a New Zealand lesbian fiction.

The problem of reading a New Zealand lesbian fiction lies, in part, in the fact that it is not yet widely recognised. I have, therefore, overviewed a body of published New Zealand lesbian fiction to make this literature more visible than has previously been the case. Taking lesbian fiction to include short fiction, poetry, plays and novels, I have listed works together in these sub-genres and applied an approximate chronology to this register. I have utilised non-fiction sources published in New Zealand lesbian periodicals as footnotes and references in later chapters to support my argument that a subsequent New Zealand lesbian fiction is both informed and enriched by these anterior sources.

¹ Castle 66.

² Castle 66.

³ Castle 2.

In Part One I addressed the idea of the postcolonial lesbian text. In Part Two I formulated a strategy for reading four novels by Renée. I have taken into account strategies already formulated in a generalised contemporary Western lesbian literary field for reading and writing lesbian fiction. Within this field there exists the view that there is a “transhistorical and transcultural constant of homosexuality that has always been present in variously similar manifestations.”⁴ This view represents a contemporary Western humanist approach to lesbian literary representation which is characterised by the question: “What is being represented?” This question is oriented to the truthful representation of real lesbians. Such Western humanist reading and writing practices have produced an idealistic and utopian lesbian fiction and lesbian literary aesthetic which aggregated in the 1970s in the metaphor of lesbian nation.⁵ In light of its specific exclusions Altman has been led to ask who is, or is not, “a citizen of [this] republic of letters.”⁶

The critical discourse on lesbian literary representation has shifted in the last few decades of the twentieth century from being largely located in a Western humanist system of representation to one which has begun to embrace the principles of a broadly defined poststructuralism. From the latter perspective the lesbian is not *essentially* anything. Poststructuralist interventions in a lesbian literary field are

⁴ Lewis 21.

⁵ Constituents of the gay and lesbian liberation movements of this time also had links with wider civil rights movements which encompassed the politics of the Left. The political arena included the appeal to black nationalism and to indigenous American Indian claims to sovereign nations.

⁶ Altman 18.

characterised by the question: “How is meaning produced in this representation of lesbian subjectivity?” From a poststructuralist perspective lesbian subjectivities are always and already sexed-gendered-sexualised (read: textualised) subjectivities. Therefore, poststructuralist approaches to lesbian representation offer strategies for reading and writing the radical alterity inherent in the text of lesbian subjectivity. In the course of my research I identified a debate taking place at the intersection of postcolonial, poststructuralist and queer theory. This debate illuminates the problematics of reading (the text of) lesbian and other subjectivities in contexts already invested in colonialist discourses.

In an overview of the extant criticism of four novels by Renée I identified a number of reviews imbued with what I have argued are signs of a colonialist literary aesthetic. Responding to these reviews I have developed a strategy for rereading colonialist discourses and, therefore, the text of colonialist subjectivities. This strategy is an adaptation of a semiological strategy formulated by Barthes for reading the signifying imperatives of classic texts. I applied my adaptation of a Barthesian reading strategy to three colonialist texts, in which the British Empire was shown to constitute a so-called true and literal denotative signified.

The British Empire can also be read as a connotative signified, a signified which itself connotes. A queer reading strategy applied to the connotative potential inherent in colonialist texts demonstrates how privileged colonialist subjectivities are always already constituted via a disavowed dependence on subjectivities

(variously) sexed-gendered-sexualised-classed-raced as female-feminine-homo-proletariat-black. In the three colonialist texts, privileged colonialist subjectivities are signified in relation to the colonised, muted and countless multitudes. My reading of the three colonialist texts also demonstrates the discursive means whereby the symbolic and cultural orders of the British Empire find their way into the cultural products which perpetuate that order. I suggested that as an ongoing effect of British textual imperialism a colonialist literary aesthetic is influencing a contemporary New Zealand literary culture, demonstrated in the critical reception of four novels by Renée.

In Part Two—given the absence of a recognised strategy or method for reading a New Zealand lesbian fiction—I adapted a Barthesian approach to the writerly text of the four novels by Renée. This strategy has enabled a reading which goes beyond the scope imposed by a colonialist literary aesthetic. I have argued and demonstrates how each of Renée’s novels is a writerly text in which heterogeneity and contradiction are multiplied as much as possible, and an infinite play of signification is promoted. My queer reading strategy demonstrates how each of four writerly novels is both a rereading of the symbolic order of the British Empire in the colonialist nation New Zealand *and* a writerly strategy for reconstituting subject positions in the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand.

For example, in *Willy Nilly* the closet is a feature of the lives of characters variously sexed-gendered-sexualised-classed-raced in colonialist discourses. The legitimating eros of the hetero-colonialist nation New Zealand signifies queerly in

each of three extended families/whanau in *Willy Nilly*. The centrality of the family headed by the lesbian mother is a writerly rereading of the view that kinship is “unshakeably rooted in heterosexual alliance and procreation.”⁷ Uncle Quentin signifies as the queer nation’s representative in the Grant family. The colonialist text (read: closet) of family is queered in the Scott family/whanau in its Maori/Pakeha constitution. The Scott family/whanau is also queered via its internal familial configurations, and queered again by association with its lesbian neighbours.

In *Daisy and Lily* the absence of the name Porohiwi from Daisy’s early life signifies the discursive privilege accorded to Pakeha familial nominations in the colonialist nation New Zealand. The discursive location of the female subject in the hetero-racist colonialist nation is also signified when a Pakeha sports fan, who is enraged that the Springbok-New Zealand rugby game he came to see is being disrupted by protesters, calls out to Daisy: “Fucking black cunt.”⁸ The symbolic economy of the colonialist nation is signified again when Lily is raped and left for dead. A writerly rereading of the epistemologically charged pairings home/homelessness manifests Home as a place of safety for the elderly lesbian couple, Daisy and Lily, in the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand. Likewise, a hetero-colonialist (read: rapist) sexuality is reconstituted in a legitimating eros of compassionate restraint for Daisy and Lily in lesbian nation Aotearoa New Zealand. In a writerly deployment of the antithesis in *Daisy and*

⁷ Weston 27.

⁸ Renée, *Daisy and Lily* 163.

Lily, Uncle Auntie, aka Magda Porohiwi–Maori, transsexual queen–manifests a queer imitation of the so-called original imperialist Queen Mother.

In a writerly deployment of the semic code in *Does This Make Sense To You?* the church-run maternity Home is a metaphor for the hetero-colonialist christian nation New Zealand. Here, where the Matron stands *loco parentis* for that nation, Flora Thornley is forced to give her illegitimate baby up for adoption. In the writerly text, *Does This Make Sense To You?*, suicide is a strategy for surmounting the symbolic economy of the colonialist nation New Zealand. Freddie, who has been sexually abused by her father since she was eleven, kills her baby and herself. Later, Ka Porohiwi is subjected to the homophobic abuses of a christian community opposed to her helping unmarried pregnant women. In their effective occupation of marginalised Maori land, the mixed-raced, lesbian couple, Mon and Lila, stake a queer claim in the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand.

In *The Snowball Waltz* the town of Porohiwi stands under a cloud “of prejudice and thinly-veiled hatred.”⁹ Here, a reading of the epistemologically charged pairing belonging/diaspora manifests a hetero-patriotic, xenophobic, racist, misogynist, masculinist nationalism (read: sexuality). Two acts of gang rape signify as *rite de passage* from boyhood innocence to hetero-masculinist patriotic manhood. A hetero-colonialist masculinist nationalism is queered by the presence of the hetero-feminised (read: soft) figures of Soft Jack Dillon, Thomas Johnson Stone, Daniel Porohiwi, Ollie Jingle, and Vincent Dix. A hetero-christian

⁹ Kate Batten, “The Snowball Waltz,” rev. of *The Snowball Waltz*, by Renée, *Marlborough Express* 24 Oct. 1997: 18.

colonialist sexuality condemns the lesbian couple, Souvie Nusz and Resa Urney, to a diasporic lesbian experience. Suicide is Resa's strategy for surviving a hetero-christian colonialist symbolic economy. In what constitutes a rereading of that symbolic economy, Souvie refuses to submit to Resa's christian conviction that their love is evil.

Taken from the numerous instances of its deployment as both a denotative signified and connotative signifier, Home figures in each of the four novels as an extended metaphor of British cultural and symbolic imperialism in the colonialist nation New Zealand. In Renée's four novels the British Empire, the colonialist nation, the colonialist home, the colonialist family, and sometimes the christian colonialist church, connotatively signify in metaphoric and metonymic relationships to each other. Across three of the four novels a widely reconstituted Porohiwi family/whanau, hapu and iwi signifies in relation to Aotearoa as a pre-colonial discursive location, to the colonialist nation New Zealand, and to the reconstituted postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand.

Each of the four novels is densely populated with a diversity of characters. A so-called "proliferation of characters" in Renée's novels can be read not so much as a tax on the reader's perseverance, but rather as writerly reading of the heterogeneity of postcolonial community in Aotearoa New Zealand.¹⁰ It has been argued that distinctions not just between, but within postcolonial societies, are crucial in any

¹⁰ Ash 28.

theorization of the postcolonial.¹¹ Within each of the four novels there are “different ways of belonging, and different New Zealands to belong to.”¹²

In my adaptation of a Barthesian strategy for reading the writerly text of the four novels, I have dislodged New Zealand lesbian fiction from a Western humanist system of representation and approached it from a broadly defined poststructuralist perspective. With respect to textual analysis, I have argued that *anyone can do it to anything*.¹³ Some lesbian feminist critics have condemned what they regard as the poststructuralist annihilation of the category lesbian, seeing it as a depoliticisation of lesbian cultural objectives. While postcolonial literary criticism and lesbian literary criticism have been generally regarded as having different histories and separate agendas each is characterised and contoured by concerns which turn out, in the elaboration of my thesis, to be shared concerns. I argue, therefore, that as the fundamental method of an ideological critique a ‘postcolonial semiology,’ which can be undertaken by anyone, provides the means for rereading lesbian and other queer subjectivities written in signifying relationships to colonialist and post-colonial contexts.

This thesis has focussed on the question: “How might a text, written in a signifying relationship to the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand, be read as a lesbian text?” My analysis shows how a text written in a signifying

¹¹ See Brydon and Tiffin, “Introduction” 11-33.

¹² Calder 13.

¹³ Silverman 250.

relationship to the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand might be read as a lesbian text when (the text of) lesbian subjectivity is understood to be always already inherent in the discursive constitution of that nation. In other words, (the text of) lesbian subjectivity is always inherent in the postcolonial nation as an effect of colonialist discourses. Across the four novels the figure of the lesbian manifests a 'postcolonial lesbian textuality' located foremost at the intersection of discourses of nationalism and sexuality. My readings of the four writerly novels have manifested various instances of the text of lesbian subjectivity, in a post-colonial context, as the postcolonial lesbian text.

Contrary to the tendency observed by Weldon of New Zealand writers effacing the place from which they write, Renée contributes to a politically and culturally specific New Zealand literature. In their treatment of issues of postcolonial national identity, each of these novels could be said to occupy a place in New Zealand postcolonial literature. My readings of the four novels by Renée also raised and addressed the question: "What have these four novels got to do with a colonialist literary aesthetic?" Within and across these texts writerly signifying practices manifest a postcolonial textuality which now raises the question: "What have these four novels got to do with a postcolonial New Zealand literary culture?" Timothy Brennan argues that "*cultural* study, and specifically the study of imaginative literature, is in many ways a profitable one for understanding the nation-centredness of the post-colonial world."¹⁴

¹⁴ Timothy Brennan, "The national longing for form," Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* 47.

In each of her four novels Renée focuses on the discursive constitution of sexual citizenship in the colonialist nation New Zealand and in the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand. Renée rereads the hetero-symbolic order of the colonialist nation New Zealand and reconstitutes a legitimating eros for the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand. Across the four novels the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand is reconstituted by a sexual diaspora which, in my queer readings, manifests variously as lesbian nation, queer nation, Maori nation and turangawaewae. The four novels by Renée's may be read as part of a decolonising sexual agenda where the queer empire writes back.¹⁵

There is a sense in which lesbians who are writers in post-colonial contexts are “cultural amphibians” in (at least) two cultural spaces.¹⁶ Gummer reports that Renée is “writing for two readerships.”¹⁷ Renée herself is aware that she “treads a fine line between remaining inaccessible to a mainstream readership as she deals with lesbian issues, or becoming too general to maintain a lesbian following.”¹⁸ It is my contention that readerships for these seemingly disparate, though (e)merging literatures are already being constituted in the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand. In view of my readings of the four novels I also suggest that they may be read individually and collectively as part of New Zealand literature, New Zealand

¹⁵ See Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin *The Empire Writes Back*.

¹⁶ Edward Said, “Figures, Configurations, Transfigurations,” *From Commonwealth to Post-Colonial*, ed. Anna Rutherford (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1992), refers to a category of writers he calls “cultural amphibians” who are at home in both metropolitan European cities and in their own societies, 4.

¹⁷ Claire Gummer, “Carefully treading a fine line,” rev. of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, by Renée, *Man to Man* 11 May 1995: 13.

¹⁸ Gummer, “Carefully treading a fine line” 13.

lesbian literature, postcolonial New Zealand literature and postcolonial (New Zealand) lesbian literature.

Joanna Russ observes: “It’s astounding what people will walk right past in literature.”¹⁹ Silverman refers to the wide relevance of the interpretive strategy offered in *S/Z*, and herself applies this strategy to lyric poems, short stories and novels. It is implicit in my thesis that the reading strategy I have applied to four novels by Renée might be usefully applied to other texts written in signifying relationships to the postcolonial nation Aotearoa New Zealand. This thesis has not, however, attempted to identify other texts to which this strategy may also be productively applied. I entrust the exploration of that possibility to a future more fully informed as to its past.

¹⁹ Joanna Russ, *How To Suppress Women's Writing* (London: Women's Press, 1984) 291.

MAORI-ENGLISH GLOSSARY

Aotearoa: North Island, or all of New Zealand – ‘land of the long white cloud’

arikinui: paramount chief or king

haerenga kainga: journey home

hapu: sub-tribe

he aha nga mahi?: what is our work?

he wahine he whenua: women and land

Hineawa: Maori girl’s name

Hirini: Sydney

Hoani Waititi Marae: an urban marae in Tamaki Makaurau

hononga wahine takatapai: lesbian studies conference

hui wahine takatapai: Maori lesbian meeting

hui: meeting, gathering

iwi: tribe, tribal grouping, tribal nation

kanohi ki te kanohi: face to face, or eye to eye

kaupapa: topic or rule

Kingitanga: Maori king movement

Koro: sir, old man, grandfather

Kuia: old lady, grandmother

mana: influence, spiritual power, authority

manawa toa: heart warrior

Maori: indigenous people of Aotearoa

Maoritanga: values, traditions and culture of the Maori

marae: forecourt of meeting house, ritual space

mokopuna: grandchild

nga ahorangi: enlightened teachers

Ngai Tahu or Kai Tahu: tribal grouping with strong links to Te Wai Pounamu

Ngati Kahungunu: tribal grouping of the Wairoa region of Te Ika a Maui

Ngati Porou: tribal grouping of the Gisborne region of Te Ika a Maui

Ngati Whatua: tribal grouping of the Tamaki Makaurau region

Noema: November

Oketopa: October

pa: village, fortress

Pakeha: European, Caucasian

Papatuanuku or Papa: mother earth

Ranginui or Rangi: sky father

Ruapehu: active volcano in Te Ika a Maui

taera rua: bisexual

taihoa: wait a while

Tainui Awhiro: hapu, or sub-tribe, of Tainui

Tainui: Waikato tribal grouping descended from Tainui waka

takatapui: homosexual

Tamaki Makaurau: Auckland region

tane takatapui: male homosexual

tangata whenua: local people

taonga: treasured possessions

tauwi: foreigner, foreigners

te ao tokowha: fourth world

te ara o te hau: path of the wind

Te Ika a Maui: North Island of New Zealand

te kakano o te whanau ki Tamaki: seed of the family of Tamaki

te Moana Nui a Kiwa: Pacific Ocean, Oceania

te reo Maori: Maori language

te Tiriti o Waitangi: Treaty of Waitangi

Te Wai Pounamu: South Island of New Zealand

te whakahuatanga o te ao: reflections of reality

tino rangatiratanga: sovereignty

Tipene: Stephen

Tuhoe: tribal grouping of the Urewera region of Te Ika a Maui

turangawaewae: place of belonging

wahine Maori: Maori woman

wahine mo nga wahine o te Moana Nui a Kiwa: women for the women of the
Pacific Ocean, Oceania

wahine takatapu: lesbian

wahine: woman, women

Waikato: central regional district of Te Ika a Maui

waka: canoe, vehicle

whakapapa: genealogy

whanau: family

whenua: land, placenta

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