

# J. C. STURM: BEFORE THE SILENCE

An exploration of her early writing

By

Margaret Erica Michael

A thesis

submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington

in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In English Literature

Victoria University of Wellington

2013

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## Abstract

This thesis considers the early works of J. C. Sturm, her own thesis, her short stories, articles and book reviews written in the 1950s before her writing and publishing silence. It examines where this writing places her in context of the post-Second World War period and where it could have placed her in the New Zealand literary canon had it not been for her ensuing literary silence.

The first chapter briefly discusses the nature of literary silences and then introduces Sturm with some biographical information. It details the approach that I take writing the thesis using three readings of her works: as social informer; as woman writer; and as Maori writer. These readings inform my commentary on her work and attempt to place her in the literary canon of the fifties. I discuss my reservations, as a Pakeha, in approaching Sturm as a Maori writer.

I use Sturm's own comments "that many literary works can be taken as social documents and many authors can be taken as social informers" as a licence to use Sturm herself as "social informer". It can be demonstrated how the ideas she promulgates in her thesis, *New Zealand Character as Exemplified in Three New Zealand Novelists* are developed in her short stories, articles and book reviews and in how Sturm holds her mirror up to New Zealand society.

Reading Sturm as a 'woman' writer demonstrates how, through her short stories, she destroyed the "idyll of suburban domesticity". Terry Sturm wrote of women's writing of the 1970s that "its main tendency is to challenge male accounts of New Zealand society and

culture". Twenty years before this date I show that J. C. Sturm was writing that woman's account and challenging the male expectations of a woman's place in the home and society.

Using Sturm's description that being a Maori writer is "a way of feeling", her short stories and articles published in *Te Ao Hou* enable a discussion of Maori writing in the fifties, exploring both the writing context and the critical environment in which this writing was received. The hindsight provided by this exploration some fifty to sixty years on demonstrates the forgetting and misremembering that can happen in a literary context and the effect that forgetting can have on a Maori literary history.

In the final section I reconstruct the somewhat artificially deconstructed strands that have made up the previous chapters, bringing Sturm's works together as a whole to enable a discussion on Sturm's rightful place in the New Zealand's literary canon of the fifties, as well as exploring further the natures of Sturm's silence in order to bring some remembering into the long forgetting of Sturm's early work.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge Alice Te Punga Somerville for starting me on this journey;

to thank Nikki Hessel for her encouragement, patience and guidance, and for giving me the belief in myself;

and to thank Mark, for making it not only possible, but allowing my dream to come true.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Literary history and the present are dark with silences: some are silences for years by our acknowledged great; some silences hidden; some the ceasing to publish after one work appears; some the never coming to book form at all. These are not the *natural* silences ... that necessary time for renewal, lying fallow, gestation, the natural cycle of creation. The silences I speak of here are unnatural: the unnatural thwarting of what struggles to come into being, but cannot (Olsen, *Silences* 6).

A fascination with all silences, particularly the silences of women, and a desire to understand why they happen led me to wonder about the twenty-year writing silence between the early works of J. C. Sturm completed in the fifties and her much better known later work written from 1989 forwards. My interest in these silences had already deepened with knowledge I gained about some of the women I met through work I did at Arohata Prison, women who do not have the words, the trust, the power or the means to break their silence. It was in trying to understand these silences that the desire grew to explore a completely different type of silence, a literary silence, a silence that occurs even when women may have the words and possibly the means to prevent it from occurring. Not only did I want to explore the silence but also to explore the effects that this silence may have had.

Many writers have discussed “silence” and the struggle to write. James K Baxter, in 1949, had an article published in *Hilltop* entitled “Why Writers Stop Writing”. He wrote:

Fatigue is inevitable in all kinds of work, brain or manual. The man with a hobby (in these days writing can only be a hobby) chooses one he can work at in a half-drugged condition that comes pleasantly after the eight-hour day spent at his paid job ... But the writer of prose or poetry requires a keen edge to his thought ... But in

time social and economic pressures forces them to the wall ... The faculty withers with disuse. (26)

Throughout this article it is clear that Baxter's writer is indeed 'man' the male, not the generic term for 'mankind' and that writing by women is not considered at all despite the fact that Sturm at this time was his wife, wrote and had been published, albeit in student publications. Virginia Woolf also considers the difficulty which writers face in *A Room of One's Own*, but as the following shows, from the woman's perspective:

Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor ... from the beginning of time. Women have had less intellectual freedom than the sons of Armenian slaves. Women then have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry. That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one's own. (125)

Woolf is arguing for more than just the time and the opportunity to write, she is arguing for the freedom those would give women, and with it the recognition that women's writing can have the same import as that of men, and that women's roles as wives, mothers and daughters can inhibit in them the intellectual freedom that appears to be more readily available to men.

For Sturm it appears that the reasons for her silence were greater than the absence of time or opportunity; the reasons appear to be both inner and outer and although they may be able to be explained at least in part by the rationales of Virginia Woolf or Tillie Olsen (or even Baxter) they are, beyond Sturm's own words and guarded explanations, only speculation gained by the piecing together of some of the evidence that may remain more than fifty years later. Sturm's later works are well known, she has received awards and critical acclaim for them, but little remains known of her early works and the lengthy period of her silence. This thesis is an exploration of these early works and an attempt to place

them in a literary context, albeit a literary context constructed in the twenty-first century, reflecting, with the benefit of hindsight, on the social and literary context of the nineteen-fifties. It also involves looking at the effect which Sturm's silence has had on the way her early works were perceived at the time, and then forgotten, misremembered or misinterpreted.

This introduction will give some understanding of Sturm's life as well as her writing history and will also detail the way that I have approached Sturm's works in order to bring a better understanding of the impact that her writing silence has had on the development of not only Maori writing but also women's writing in New Zealand.

J. C. Sturm was born Te Kare Papuni in Opunake, Taranaki in 1927 of Taranaki and Whakatoa descent<sup>1</sup>. Fourteen days after her birth her mother died of septicaemia and her grief-stricken father took her older sister and returned to his whanau on the East Coast. Te Kare became whangai to her grandmother. When her grandmother became seriously ill she asked a local nurse, Ethel Sturm, and her husband, Bert, to look after the little girl. They fostered and then adopted Te Kare renaming her Jacqueline Cecilia Sturm.

Although Bert was Ngati Porou, Ethel was Pakeha, and J. C. Sturm was brought up in a predominantly Pakeha fashion. However, as the Sturms were Salvation Army church members this Pakeha fashion was dominated by a sense of social awareness and responsibility. None the less she remained aware of her father's (and her own) difference: "I don't know when I realised my foster father was different. I think I always sensed it ... It was about this time that I realised I was different too" ("Wanting the Stars to Play With" 167).

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<sup>1</sup> These biographical details have been gathered from Sturm's own words in interviews and from that which has been published about her by others.



Sturm became the victim of bullying, racist taunts and assaults, and when she was about seven she refused to go to school. Eventually she was induced back to school by a kindly headmaster in Palmerston North with the promise that at intervals and lunch times she could always play on the parallel bars. She then began to enjoy school, particularly the small coastal school in Pukerua Bay she later attended. However, at this point her education was interrupted by illness. It was during this illness that Sturm began writing poetry. Although none of these poems remains Sturm found that writing “worked”. She said in an interview with Roma Potiki in 2006: “I could paint pictures with words. And I learned then, probably the most important thing, the power of words” (Sec. 1).

Sturm did well at school and attracted the attention not only of her teachers but also the Anglican Bishop of Aotearoa, Bishop Frederick A. Bennett. By the time she was in Standard Six she “had taken on board the expectations of the Sturms, their friends and my teachers” (“Wanting the Stars to Play With” 170). Sturm acknowledges that she was lucky that the expectations of her were positive: “imagine if you can what my life would have been like if I’d been saddled with a matching set of negative expectations, as so many Maori children were then, and still are” (“Wanting the Stars to Play With” 170).

Sturm reflects on the upbringing she received from the Sturms in a poem in her first anthology *Dedications* published in 1996, “In loco parentis for Ethel and Bert”. She describes the difficult childhoods both her adoptive parents had and the marriage they built for themselves saying that she did not really “know” these things, just as she did not understand why they had adopted her. She understands that for all their efforts she did not become what they expected.

Nor do I know when love-hate  
Became a kind of anxious caring

Living together, a duty not a joy

Or why they took me in. Maybe

Her menopausal hunger to be needed

One more time, sniffed me out,

A rare impulse to do a lasting good

Persuaded him to give

A motherless child a home.

Twenty years they planted, nurtured

Trained, pruned, grafted me

Only to find a native plant

Will always a native be (lines 18-30).

However, in the final verse she demonstrates her gratitude for what they did give her:

How being out of step, place, tune, joint

In time became a preference

Not a pain, hardly matters now.

More profitable to recall instead

Daily lessons in caring and sharing

Beyond necessity, her singing

Around the house when there was

Nothing to sing about, his hands

Grown old, moving so carefully

So gently among the roses

And forget the rest (lines 31-41).

The social consciousness which the Sturms and their Salvation Army beliefs had engendered in their young daughter became more personal to her as a teenager when she visited her father's people in the Bay of Plenty and the Ureweras and saw for the first time the real differences that could exist between Maori and Pakeha. This understanding gave her more motivation to take on the expectations of those who felt she should become a role model to Maori so that in 1946 she left home to attend Otago University with these expectations and "a good scholastic record and a moderate bursary" ("Wanting the Stars to Play With" 170).

At university Sturm was the only Maori woman. She said in an interview with Paul Millar in 2005, "Wherever I went in those days I was a minority of one" (Millar, "No One Would Have Given Tuppence" 146). Sturm worked hard to measure up to the expectations put on her. As she had a Department of Health Bursary she was expected to achieve the very high marks required for entry into Medical School. Her marks were in the nineties but entry was denied to her because the influx of returned servicemen from the Second World War were guaranteed places despite much lower entry marks. She tried for a second year, and did gain entry to Medical School, but instead chose to continue with anthropology, a subject which had begun to interest her. In so doing she left Otago University at the end of 1947 and enrolled at Canterbury University to study under Professor Sutherland.

During her years at Otago Sturm began writing poetry, some of which was published in the student newspaper, *Critic*, and also in the Otago students' literary review. It was at Otago that she met James K. Baxter and when she moved to Christchurch he too had moved there. At Canterbury University Sturm was still pressured to succeed in order for her to become a leader among Maori. Millar relates a conversation Sturm said she had with Baxter about these expectations:

And he said, “Are you going to spend your whole life being a holy cow?” I said, “A what?” ... What do you mean?” And he said, “Well they are just milking you. You won’t have any life of your own.” And I took umbrage at this. This was unheard of people didn’t go round saying things like that. Everyone knew that young Maori who had special privileges and opportunities and encouragements had to make the most of all our opportunities so that we could work for “the Maori People”. And of course Baxter ... just said mildly, “oh well ... good luck.” And I went down like a pricked balloon, because of course I knew more than anybody else just how much luck I needed (“No One Would Have Given Tuppence” 143).

Baxter, and by association Sturm, joined the literary group that included Denis Glover, Colin McCahon, Allen Curnow and Bill Pearson. Sturm remained on the outskirts of this group, but grew close to Pearson who, because of his (hidden) homosexuality, also felt an outsider. Pearson edited *Canta*, the Canterbury University student magazine. He made Baxter the literary editor responsible for the works selected for publication. Sturm submitted poems to *Canta* but these were never published until Baxter was away for a few weeks and Pearson took over the editorship, accepting and publishing several of her poems on the same pages as poems of Baxter’s.

Sturm graduated with a BA in 1948, one of the first Maori women to graduate from university. In December of the same year she and Baxter married and moved to Wellington where their daughter, Hilary, was born in 1949. Their son, John, was born in 1952, and soon after Sturm completed her MA in Philosophy achieving first class honours with a thesis entitled “New Zealand National Character as Exemplified in Three New Zealand Novelists”. In this she explored the novels of Sargeson, Davin and Mulgan.

Despite the physical and financial hardships, and the difficulties that existed in the marriage, Sturm continued to write. Rather than continuing with poetry, possibly seeing herself as always being in Baxter’s shadow, Sturm started to write prose. Paul Millar wrote, “when an

editor offended her by suggesting Baxter assisted her writing, she turned to prose, using J. C. Sturm as her pen-name to avoid all association (Millar, "Jacquie Baxter/J. C. Sturm" 95). Sturm herself said, "I 'discovered' Katherine Mansfield. I was completely bowled over ... I thought: I think I can write a story, and I did" ("Between the Roses and the Taupata" 175). This change of genre to short stories may also have been influenced by the noncommittal response she received from her husband when he read her work. Sturm commented in the interview with Roma Potiki in 2006, "And I thought well he's a poet and I'm not. But I still wanted to do something so I thought, I know what I'll do, I'll write short stories and see what happens. And I loved them" (3).

Another influence in this change of genre may have been the attitudes to women poets she saw demonstrated by the male literary group with whom Baxter associated. Writing in these early post-war years was difficult for women, with the freedoms they had discovered pre-war and during the war being lost as the men returning reclaimed the positions they had held before the war, and also expected to find life as they had left it, or as they imagined it to be when they were so far from home. Although Mansfield and Frame were recognised and well-regarded as short story writers there was a backlash from the newly emerging Modernist writers and poets against the writing of the thirties and forties. Fairburn, Glover and Curnow were particularly vociferous and outspoken about poetry which had been published in that pre-war period with Fairburn writing in 1935 a letter to Glover that "the Menstrual school of poetry is in the ascendant, and a mere male is treated with scant respect" (*Letters* 95) and Glover writing in 1937:

Alas New Zealand literature distils  
 an atmosphere of petticoats and frills  
 (or shall we say, to shock the vicars,  
 An atmosphere or petticoats and knickers?)  
 ... Our lady poets these: hermaphroditic

he is at once their guide, their friend, their critic. (*The Arraignment of Paris* 19-22, 53, 54 ).

This view, that writing seriously was the domain of males, continued past the Second World War years, as Patrick Evans describes in *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature*:

For middle-class males of that post-war generation, literature was a heritage, something they came to naturally around the middle of the Sixties and began to use without question ... But for women and for Maori and for Maori women, the literary heritage was something that belonged to men (215).

Even when women did write there was resistance from editors to publish their work. O'Leary (2011) in his thesis "Social and Literary Constraints On Women Writers In New Zealand 1945-1970" indicates, with his analysis of the comparative numbers of works by each gender published in various genre, that this bias against women during the fifties and sixties was noticeable. When Marris (a 'Georgian' and subject of *The Arraignment of Paris*) was publishing *New Zealand's Best Poems* between 1933 and 1941 there were forty-five entries from males and fifty-nine from females, whereas Curnow's ('modernist') anthology in 1945 included only two women among the sixteen poets in total. Items by women in *Landfall* between 1951 and 1956 numbered eighteen whereas there were ninety-eight articles by men published. Even when work by women was published it was largely not commented on. As Lydia Wevers writes, "It is easy to infer from the bulk of largely unnoticed published writing by women that some forms of discrimination have been practised by editors and publishers in New Zealand and elsewhere" ("History of the Short Story" 185). Despite these prejudices and difficulties Sturm continued writing whilst also managing to care for her home and two very small children. She experienced the hard work that writing was, and did at times become dejected, as she relates:

It was sheer hard work ... And there was the business side to it like anything else. And also, which I hadn't realised, that it was pretty competitive. I was a bit disillusioned by all this ... There was a group of writers in Wellington, young married with families, struggling with jobs they didn't particularly like, still writing, trying to find their niche in the literary world. Exciting place to be if you didn't lose your head (Woods interview 175).

However, *Sturm* was published, first in the fledgling literary magazine *Numbers* and then in *Te Ao Hou*, two very different publications. *Numbers*, edited by Louis Johnson, was the quarterly literary successor of *Hilltop* and *Arachne*, publications out of Wellington, and to some extent mandated by the Victoria University College Literary Society. Its first editorial stated that its aim was to publish work which "by its experimental nature or forthrightness, may frighten more timid editors" (32). It was established as a reaction to what the "Wellington writers" (a loose group which included Baxter, Glover, Witheford, Smithyman and a Dutch immigrant Eric Schwimmer) saw as the more conservative publications from the rest of New Zealand, particularly Auckland. Schwimmer who had also been involved with *Hilltop* and *Arachne* went on to become editor of *Te Ao Hou*, which was funded and published by the Department of Maori Affairs as a magazine for Maori people, whose purpose was described in its first editorial as being "to provide interesting and informative reading for Maori homes ... a marae on paper"(1, 2). A third magazine launched around this time was *Landfall* under the editorship of Charles Brasch. *Sturm* was never published in *Landfall* under Brasch's editorship. She relates this in the interview with Woods: "And so from the early fifties up until 1968 I wrote stories and I had them published. I was turned down consistently and quite firmly by several magazines and especially *Landfall*" (176).

The rejection of *Sturm*'s work may have been because the "social naturalism", as Gadd describes it in his 1985 review of *The House of the Talking Cat*, may have offended the "genteel aestheticism of Brasch's editorship" (Evans, *Penguin History* 99). It is ironic that the magazine which thirty years earlier so "consistently and firmly" rejected *Sturm*'s stories published an early review of them when they were finally published. *Sturm* eventually did have a short article published in *Landfall* 183 in April 1993, which was to serve, as the Editorial Note states "as a 1990s memorial to Charles Brasch and the *Landfall* of the 1950s"

(2). This article, “Three Men and Their Mags”, reflects kindly on Brasch as well as on Sturm’s two earliest publishers, Johnson and Schwimmer.

Sturm continued writing throughout the fifties and sixties publishing a total of six short stories as well as several book reviews and articles, seventeen items in all which constituted a reasonably steady amount of work covering a period of about fourteen years. She became the first Maori writer to have a short story in English included in a New Zealand anthology when “For All the Saints” was published in *New Zealand Short Stories Second Series* edited by C.K. Stead in 1966. “For All the Saints” had first been published in *Te Ao Hou* in December 1955. Stead wrote in his introduction to the anthology that the “emphasis of the present volume is on new developments” and then went on further to say, “all of [the writers] have been through a school in which every statement is measured, not by the roundness of its vowels or the ease of its syntax, but by its power to reach out to, and grasp, a recognisable experience” (np).

During this time Sturm became a member of the Maori Women’s Welfare League and also Ngati Poneke. In an interview cited by Millar in “Nobody would have given tuppence for our chances” Sturm said, “I became pretty involved with the concert party. I went to hui, Maori competitions. And I’d take the children. The children joined” (“No One Would Have Given Tuppence” 189). However, in 1966 the Baxter family moved to Dunedin and these activities were put on hold. The Baxters were able to renew their earlier friendship with Janet Frame with whom Sturm had been briefly acquainted at Otago University, and both were able to share having their stories published together in Stead’s anthology.

However, Sturm felt her many rejections deeply even if she did deal with them somewhat pragmatically, saying “in the end I had enough — lengthwise — for a book and I looked at it and rearranged it so that it hung together — I dropped out one or two of them — and I had



a collection. No-one was interested so I thought right, OK, into the bottom drawer” (Woods interview 175).

At the end of 1968 the Baxter family returned to Wellington. But the marriage was over when Baxter moved first to Auckland and then founded his commune on the Whanganui River. Sturm remained in Wellington and needed to work to financially support herself and her granddaughter for whom she had full-time care.

By now we were in our middle forties and I had chosen to look after a new baby, my granddaughter ... That’s part of the story. So he went North and did that, and I returned to Wellington ... and I concentrated on looking after my granddaughter. I suddenly had to join the work force. I didn’t write another thing for eighteen years (Woods interview 176).

Sturm described this period in more detail in an interview with Roma Potiki in 2006 saying:

And I thought, right, it’s time to do a bit of pruning to your life and trim off all the fancy bits. So I pulled out of all the Maori activities that I was involved in — which included Ngati Poneke and the Maori Education Foundation and the Maori Women’s Welfare League. And the other thing that I had to drop was any writing, because survival was the name of the game and I had to get out and get a job (14).

Olsen wrote, “Where the gifted among women (and men) have remained mute, or have never attained full capacity it is because of circumstances, inner or outer, which oppose the needs of creation” (*Silences* 17). In Sturm’s case it appears that it was the collision of both inner and outer circumstances which caused her extended literary silence. Jeffrey Paparoa Holman, in his obituary for Sturm, wrote: “What should have been the beginning of a promising literary career proved stillborn, as Sturm struggled with relationship difficulties

brought on by Baxter's alcoholism, his religious enthusiasms, and the final breakdown of their marriage" (22).

However, during this silence, in fact as early as 1975, Sturm was approached by Witi Ihimaera for any stories she might have that he and Don Long could consider for inclusion in an anthology of Maori writing they were planning to publish. This anthology, *Into the World of Light*, whose genesis had been in 1973, was not finally published until 1982, by which point Sturm's short stories had again been taken from "the drawer" and were about to be published themselves. In 1975 Sturm sent her collection to Ihimaera who selected from them two stories to be published in the anthology. However despite Sturm's delight at Ihimaera's comments about her work she did not appear tempted to return to writing at that point.

Although Sturm's writing may have been silenced, she was still visible as a librarian in the New Zealand Room of the Wellington Public Library. In 1980 she was asked to be part of a Spiral Women's Collective reading at the opening of the Women's Gallery. Others taking part in this reading were Keri Hulme and Patricia Grace. Sturm read "A Thousand and One Nights" which led to Spiral Collective publishing her collection as *The House of the Talking Cat* in 1983. The collection received positive reviews, was shortlisted for the New Zealand Book Awards and was reprinted by Hodder and Stoughton in 1986.

Sturm returned to writing poetry and in 1996 her first book of poetry *Dedications* was published by a new publishing house, Steele Roberts. This book received the Honour Award for poetry in the Montana Book Awards in 1997. Also published in 1996 by Whitireia Publishing was a collection of poems by Sturm and three other writers, Adrienne Jensen, Meg Campbell and Harry Ricketts. In 2000 a further anthology of poetry, *Postscripts*, was published, followed, in 2006, by *The Glass House* a collection of stories and poems. The title

of this collection is taken from the first story. “The glass house” was the longest story that Sturm had written in the early sixties, but she removed it from her *House of the Talking Cat* anthology because it did not fit. More than forty years later she had found a place for it.

J. C. Sturm died on 30 December 2009 at the age of 82. She is buried at the foot of her mother, Mary’s, grave in the urupa of the Orimupiko Marae in Taranaki.

### **Three Readings: An Approach to Sturm's Writing**

Paul Millar wrote in his obituary honouring Sturm that "Her stories enact an unequal and discomforted social world" ("Jacquie Baxter" 98). It is Sturm's portrayal of this "unequal and discomforted social world" which I wish to explore in her early writing through three different ways of reading her; by reading her as a social informer, a woman writer and as a Maori writer. I will use her thesis, her short stories, her book reviews and the articles she had published to demonstrate the place that Sturm does hold in New Zealand's literary canon of the fifties and sixties, and to advocate that had this place been recognised as such at the time, then Sturm may have been heralded at the forefront of not only Maori writing, but also women's and broader writing in general.

In determining my approach to her early writing I needed to consider what has already been written about Sturm's early writing and use that to inform my approach. However, very little has been written on Sturm's early works and so I needed to look more widely for guidance. I found it easier to consider approaches to the chapters on Sturm, the woman, and Sturm the social informer as even in the fifties these voices were recognised in published works, and as a female myself and having worked extensively in the social services I felt more qualified to comment. It is my very background from within the social services sector which gave rise to my own perceived difficulty in developing an approach for the Maori chapter. When working with Maori I had learned to listen to the whanau or iwi and not to impose a Pakeha bureaucratic perspective which may not be effective. There was also difficulty because in the fifties the Maori voice in English writing was only beginning to be heard and recognised. I also hoped to be able, broadly at least, to have some similarity in approach for each chapter.

I have thus found that my approach to discussing Sturm as a Maori writer is complex. I am aware of Bella Te Aku Graham's article "Riding Someone Else's Waka: Academic Theory and Tribal Identity" in which she makes clear that Maori must be allowed to speak for themselves, and not be reinterpreted by Western academics. I needed to find a way to read Sturm and to write about her works while avoiding the trap of reinterpreting and giving only a "reflection" of me. How do I allow Sturm to speak for herself? Discovering the answer to these questions has not only given me the approach to the Maori chapter but also provided the approach that I have been able to use in my discussions of Sturm as a social informer and as a woman writer.

When her first book of short stories was published in 1983, many of the stories had been written and published up to thirty years earlier. Gadd commented that there "was an air of datedness" about the stories in *House of the Talking Cat* and saw in them an ambivalence which he deemed "the price Sturm had to pay to be published — and the price most Maori writers still have to pay — is to pander to middleclass pakeha sensibilities and ethnocentrism"(359). Wevers comments that "Maori writers speak in a different language, but by giving voice to the silent other, the other who most explicitly and uncomfortably challenges cultural hegemony and given social structures, Maori writers rewrite New Zealand in English, their fictions breaking out of and therefore signifying their silence"("History of the Short Story" 127). It is this "breaking out of" silence which so fascinates me about Sturm as she was able to break out of what had been a total (published) Maori silence in the late forties and fifties, but then again became silenced. However, Wevers' comment also highlights a concern for me and that is the way that under a Western paradigm, research might code indigenous people as "Other", further marginalising them and their stories and doing what Tuhiwai Smith calls "research through imperial eyes" (43). How do I avoid "middleclass sensibilities" and "imperial eyes", especially when reading works that were written at a time when "middleclass sensibilities" and "imperial eyes" were all-pervading?

I realised that I needed to go back to Sturm, and what she has said, not just words she has used in her stories, poems and articles but what she has said about being Maori, being a writer and about being a Maori writer. In an interview with Roma Potiki, Sturm said:

Some would say 'You're not a Maori writer.' The fact that I'm at least half Maori doesn't seem to make any difference if you don't write about Maori themes. As far as I'm concerned if it suits me to write about Maori themes I'll do it. But if I want to write instead about the plight of the Kanaks in Noumea before the failed rebellion there, I'll do that. I don't feel obliged because I'm Maori to restrict myself to Maori themes, you'd be surprised the number of people who do have that expectation of a Maori writer. There are one or two people I saw were under that restriction for quite a long time (6).

Sturm's writing does reflect a range of themes, and if we look at the wide gamut of her published work the range extends even further, from book reviews to short stories, to her thesis and to articles on the Maori Women's League and Ngati Poneke.

Sturm says in the interview with Briar Wood that "... in whaikorero, in Maori, we come at things always obliquely ... At one stage when I was writing short stories, I thought: if the time comes when I can say what I want to say and not once refer to it, I will have done what I want to do" (180). It is thus clear that Sturm does not want to tell the reader everything, that she is deliberately being oblique in her work and that we, the readers, need to find things out for ourselves. Sturm gives further insights in understanding her approach when she continues: "Maori is a metaphorical language and a way of thinking and coping with the environment ... but I don't do things because I'm Maori, or write about things because I'm a Maori writer; I write about things that have a meaning and significance to me no matter what they are, where they happen, what the context is" (181).

In the interview with Roma Potiki, Sturm elaborates further about writing as a Maori:

Being Maori as an artist, whether you're painting a sun or writing like I am, being Maori it's more a way of feeling, it's a way of attitude, rather than of content ... but in the long run what you have to do is, you have to find your own stance. I'm trying to avoid the word style. I don't like that so much, but you've got to find your own voice (7).

She demonstrates her writing about things which have meaning and significance in two of the book reviews she wrote, a review of Alpers' biography of Katherine Mansfield and a review of Alan Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope*, the former for *Numbers* and the latter in *Te Ao Hou*. She commented "Mr Alpers' forte is undoubtedly his gift for describing relationships" (36) and concluded that Mansfield was forced to accept a truth "that she had denied all her life, that living is more important than, and in the last simple analysis, fundamental to art" (37). Yet despite the seriousness of the subject and her obvious admiration for both Mansfield and Alpers she chooses not to restrain her wit with a comment that Frank Swinnerton's review of the same book in *John o' London's Weekly* "was obviously written after he had dined and wine too well, and with a brain urgently in need of more oxygen" (37). More seriously, she found that Paton's "detailed and sensitive study [of the main character] is so sensitively done that the reader cannot help identifying himself with the unfortunate man. But it is not just a clever book and it is never smart. Insight and understanding are more necessary to a writer than cleverness or even style. Mr Paton has both of these ..." (54).

In both reviews Sturm emphasises the importance of relationships, and this importance is found in all her work. She says, "what I'm writing about is relationships. Of people. Attitudes of people to one another" (Wood 177). She goes on further in this interview with Briar Wood to say "And how they react within their cultural limitations. I hate to use the word cultural clashing, but, if you like cultural meeting" (177). However, if we are to gain an

understanding of Sturm, Maori writer, then it may be through looking at these “cultural meetings”. “Cultural meetings”, and in particular cultural limitations or clashing between Maori and Pakeha, are made explicit in only one of Sturm’s stories, “The First Native and Pink Pig”. This story describes the difficulties a young Maori boy had with a bully at school, his strategy to overcome them and his mother’s powerlessness to protect him from this racism. But the story goes even beyond this for Sturm leaves the reader realising that the ten-year-old boy has to protect his mother from the pain he is suffering. Sturm said of this story, “If you want to know how I feel about racial relations in New Zealand then you’ve got it there. I don’t need to go on and write a whole book about the stuff” (Potiki 7).

It is this obliquity that Gadd described as “ambivalence” (358) and it is an obliquity that was perhaps necessary in the period in which Sturm was writing, for as Jennifer Sturm states “a narrative of malcontent would have been viewed with alarm and suspicion ... as narratives which deal either directly or indirectly with issues of racism were not seen in print before publication of her stories” (*Broken Journey*). It is this obliquity which brings what Wevers describes as “this quality of buried shock” (“Short Fiction by Maori Writers” 28).

So what answers have I found in my quest for an approach to, not only this chapter, Sturm, Maori writer, but also to Sturm, woman writer and Sturm social informer? The first thing that I have found is that there is obliqueness to Sturm’s work— she will not spell out answers for me, but will lead me to find my own answers. In leading me, however, some things are very clear, including that she writes about things that are important to her, that she writes about relationships with “insight and understanding” (the qualities she prescribed to Paton) and that she brings to her writing the metaphorical way of thinking and coping which she prescribes to Maori language. Although Sturm said that she felt that she had a leg in both Maori and Pakeha cultures and that “as a person, that’s where I’ve lived my life, in the small space between” she writes in a much wider context. As Millar says “her



stories enact an unequal and discomforted social world”, a world in which she can be seen as Maori writer, feminist writer, and social informer.

I have found the way to approach Sturm’s early writing in Sturm’s own words which she used in the interview with Woods, “I consider myself a Maori writer whether my work has any Maori content or not because we are talking about a way of looking, a way of feeling and a way of being.” It is by examining Sturm’s way of looking, feeling and being that I can begin my discussions of her early works.

When reading Sturm as a social informer I will discuss the particular aspects which I see as highlighted in her early works: puritanism, hypocrisy and social mores of the post-Second World War period. It is interesting reading some of the writings of those dominant in New Zealand literature of this period and seeing the bigotry, racism and chauvinism expressed by the writers of the day (Fairburn, Glover and Johnson come to mind) and so I will explore how Sturm’s social commentary differs from those writers who may have perceived themselves as presenting the pervading social picture of the period.

In looking at the woman’s perspective that Sturm brings to her writing, I will discuss how her perspective, which may have been challenging in the era in which she was writing, became, by the time *House of the Talking Cat* was finally published as a whole collection in 1983, more acceptable, more in keeping with the sociological discussions of the time. I will discuss this perspective as demonstrated in her short stories and her thesis and show through close readings of her works how much of Sturm’s writing is from a perspective of alienation, and although much of this alienation is because of race, it is also because of gender.

In the chapter focussing on Sturm as a Maori writer I will reflect on Sturm's own words about herself as a Maori writer and what she was trying to achieve in her works. Wevers notes that "cultural identity is textual as well as racial, social, historical and linguistic" (*The History of the Short Story* 136) and I will use these and other concepts of Maori writing as determined by a range of critics. This chapter will include works that Sturm had published in *Te Ao Hou* as well as in *Numbers* and so will include articles, reviews and short stories. I will also discuss some of the markers of Maori writers as have been determined by (mainly non-Maori) critics and which do not feature in Sturm's writing and which may have led to some of her early work being disregarded by some "arbiters" of good Maori writing.

I will then bring these readings back together and reconstruct, as it were, the deconstruction that necessarily happens when one tries to separate into distinct and disparate parts, Sturm's writing so that the contribution she made to New Zealand's literary canon of the fifties can be fully appreciated.

## **Chapter 2: J. C. Sturm: Social Informer — “An unequal and discomforted world”**

In her thesis Sturm makes the comment that literary works may be used “as a source of information about the writer, his experience of his age, and the places and people he knows. In other words many literary works can be taken as social documents, and many authors can be taken as social informers ...” (“New Zealand Character” 91). In this chapter I will demonstrate how Sturm herself is a social informer, not only in the short stories she wrote, but also in the articles and book reviews she had published, and, most obviously, in her thesis. Initially this chapter was to be entitled “J. C. Sturm: Social Commentator” a phrase which can imply someone from the outside looking on but which indicates a degree of impartiality and balance. It was the above statement of Sturm’s that made me rethink the title, as I remain concerned throughout this thesis to use Sturm’s own words and to reflect her “way of feeling” and continue to allow her to speak for herself. Sturm goes on to say that she does not wish to imply “that a writer’s first duty is to be a flawless mirror of his society” but that “we are concerned with the writer as an informer who is able to detach himself from his cultural matrix, becomes critically aware of it, and then translates his subjective experience into objective social terms” (91). In this chapter I will use Sturm’s thesis as a starting point for my discussion and explore how the ideas she promulgates in the thesis have been developed in her short stories to describe her perspective of the individual realities of some ordinary New Zealanders. I will also demonstrate the depth of her own role as social informer through a discussion of her book reviews.

It is useful to review the context, both social and literary, in which Sturm was writing. Oliver wrote “In less than twenty years the whole society had passed through a series of awakening experiences — depression, recovery, mobilization, the prospect of invasion, victory, peace and the brief surge of hope that it brought. These crowded years transformed a colonial society into an independent one; they shaped the literature and the art of the

1940s and 1950s" (539). In 1940 New Zealand celebrated the centenary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, which the Labour Government of the day hoped would generate national pride. This "national pride" was evidenced in much of the writing of the time demonstrating a desire to escape from the colonial past and to find a "New Zealand self" — a national character. Many writers became concerned with the concept of a single national character and in her thesis Sturm determines to explore how this character is described in a range of New Zealand writing. Sturm writes that "national character appears as an expansion and/or variation of the character structure of the whole large cultural group to which the particular nation in question belongs" (5) and that "the main body of this thesis may be described as an enquiry into New Zealand's particular variation of the theme, the character structure of the western European man" (4), but in so doing excluding women and Maori from this discussion. (Perhaps demonstrating at the same time that they were also discarded as providing little in the way of literary interest thus also pointing to Sturm's own awareness that the New Zealand character was limited by gender and racial bias.) In her thesis Sturm examines the works of Sargeson, Mulgan and Davin using the criteria of "direct comment, character studies, descriptions of people and their reactions to certain situations" (1). She also wanted to work out the extent to which there was agreement among the authors as to what constituted New Zealand character. Sturm's chapter headings signal the focus she is highlighting in each of the author's works; "Frank Sargeson and Little Bethel", "John Mulgan and Man Alone", and "Dan Davin and Family Relations".

Little Bethel is the name Sargeson uses to describe the traits he saw in his parents and which he thought demonstrated what was wrong with New Zealand society, his father's puritanism and work ethic and his mother's materialism and slavery to convention. Although the term "Little Bethel" comes from a reference to the Methodist chapel Sargeson used it as a generic term, of no specific denomination, to refer to those who demonstrate uncompromising puritanism and a moral and psychological tyranny. Sargeson, however, as Sturm identifies, poses contrasting difficulties when his works are being used as an exemplar of New Zealand character; the first is that his use of a "casual and colloquial" (8)

form of expression may mean the readers take “his understatements at their face value and so miss the full measure of their significance” (8), and the second is that he voices his protests about society with “examples of behaviour so extreme as to be almost caricatures” (8). Nonetheless Sturm identifies Sargeson’s very strong reaction to the “middleclass non-conformist group with their religious inadequacies” (8) and she, herself, describes aspects of an intolerant and unforgiving puritanical society in “For All the Saints”.

The narrator in Sturm’s story works in a hospital kitchen and befriends Alice, a Maori woman in whom she saw “some indefinable quality that made her quite different from the rest of us” (58). The other staff, not seeing the “indefinable quality” warn the narrator that “Alice is a woman with bad blood, a treacherous character ...” (60), reminiscent of Sargeson’s outcast characters such as Mrs Crawley in “An Affair of the Heart” and the old man in “Cow-pats”. Although the narrator dismisses these ignorant comments she demonstrates her own middleclass values in her reaction to Alice’s disclosure that she is illiterate: “I was horrified. Words like progress civilisation higher standards and free secular compulsory sprang to their feet in protest” (60). Failing in her efforts to teach Alice to read, the narrator agrees to take Alice to church. Her reaction to Alice’s Sunday outfit again demonstrates her middleclass sensibilities: “she was wearing a long pale pink garment that looked suspiciously like a night gown ... a skinny mangy piece of fur that even a manx cat wouldn’t have looked at ... [B]ut it was the hat that took my breath away” (62). At church, however, the narrator sees the brightness and colour of Alice’s appearance in contrast with the “drab grey unadorned walls ... the worn patches in the faded red carpets ... and the underlying greenness of the minister’s old black suit” (62). Alice’s enthusiasm, as she droned the hymns louder than the squeaks from the small huddle of the rest of the congregation, encourages the reader to see a congregation which seems to epitomise the cold puritanism despised by Sargeson. At the end of the story, Alice “is put away quietly” (62). Sturm’s Alice is an outcast, an outcast because of her race, her illiteracy and her mental unwellness, and an outcast and misfit who society then “puts away.” Sargeson describes society’s misfits and outcasts in many of his stories, often using them to make a point about the simplicity of

their lives compared with those lives of the mainstream New Zealanders. In "For All the Saints" Sturm has refined the caricatures that Sargeson's misfits often seem and created in Alice a character who, although an outcast, is one for whom the reader can develop a real empathy. Alice names the narrator as 'Jacko', "... the name she liked to call me" says the narrator (61). By choosing a name similar to her own name Sturm appears to be inviting the reader to include Sturm the writer as the one who also initially made value judgements, but who now (with hindsight?) sees Alice as belonging with the saints described by the title of the story which appears to be taken from the hymn of the same name by William Walsham How.

Sturm uses another hymn as the title for the story "Jerusalem, Jerusalem" which again is about those whom society has cast out, but in this story it is a Samoan family who are the outsiders. The narrator in this story is waiting on a street corner when a face in the crowd, "a small oval of meaning" (101) stands out and she is taken back to her childhood at the Bay where a public works camp provides accommodation for the families of road workers. One of these families is the Kelly family, a Pakeha father married to a Samoan wife and their five children, who live in a condemned house on the beach. The narrator, as a child, spends all her free time playing with these children who especially enjoyed playing the hymn 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem' and the 'Hawaiian War Chant' on an old record player. She took some time to "get the hang" of listening to a hymn the way the Kelly children did and like Alice, the children demonstrate more wisdom than either narrator (105). The narrator's family moves from the Bay and she does not know what became of the Kellys. It is Olive, the oldest daughter, the familiar face in the crowd, who tells that her mother died and the children were placed in an orphanage, "put away quietly". The boys, with whom the narrator had enjoyed such a carefree time in her childhood, struggle as adults to be part of society and, as they become further alienated, spend time in prison. The two little girls struggle as well, with one becoming a very young unmarried mother and the other, unwell, in a sanatorium. The Kellys, like Alice are not people to envy, people who have a trouble-

and carefree life, but are people who, because of the place in which their respective societies place them, remain outcasts.

Sturm's use of hymn names as titles for these two stories is interesting as it places the stories in a particular time, a time when readers would be familiar not only with the titles but also with the text and therefore the context of each hymn. Thus Alice is cast as one of the saints who, according to the hymn, is promised blessing and eventual triumph. Mrs Kelly, the untiring mother of "Jerusalem, Jerusalem" finds her Jerusalem, her rest all too soon for the well-being of her family. The use of a religious motif also serves to demonstrate how far Sturm's society is from the Christian ideal of loving one's neighbour and demonstrating charity.

Sturm also explores Sargeson's ideas about relationships, both the relationships that men have with each other, and male/female relationships within which he sees that men and women can never find any common ground. "Even marriage as Sargeson sees it, is not usually a relationship which lessens the distance between a man and a woman, very often it only throws into relief their fundamental ignorance of each other, and aggravates the misunderstanding and disappointment which follows inevitably on the heels of disillusioned romantic love" ("New Zealand Character" 18). Sturm does not see that sexual activity brings any closer understanding to these relationships, "Sex, as Sargeson describes it, is a screen against which guilty feelings, inhibitions and anxieties are projected; it is an outlook for or escape from all kinds of emotions: boredom, loneliness, inferiority feelings, depression, aggression even despair and grief" (18). Interestingly Sturm herself explores the same concept of sex as escape, but for women, rather than the more acceptable escape for men. Although it appeared perfectly in order for men to write of sexual matters New Zealand literature did not seem well-disposed to women writing about sexuality. In 1920 Jane Mander received negative reviews in New Zealand for her *Story of a New Zealand River* despite it being well received in England and the United States. Michael King writes that it

was “reviewed with hostility, largely because of what was regarded as ‘immoral’ content” (320). Even by the fifties views about explicit sexual content especially when written by women had not changed greatly. Despite this Sturm had two short stories published in *Numbers* which explore the concept of women engaging in extramarital sex. “For the Novelty” tells of a young unmarried girl having, somewhat hesitantly, a sexual interlude with the man she is dating, and “The Earrings” describes a married woman on an afternoon outing which has the possibility of ending in the bed of her husband’s friend. Controversy followed the publication of “For the Novelty” when it appeared in *Numbers Nine* in 1959. This edition of *Numbers* was written to coincide with the Wellington Festival of the Arts and created an outcry in the *Dominion* and *The Evening Post* with both newspapers railing against the stories of “Illicit love” and “salacious tales” (*Dominion* and *Evening Post* February 10 1959 respectively, as cited by Johnson in *Numbers Ten* 5). The stories referred to were “For the Novelty” by Sturm, “Gingerbread Man” by Marilyn Duckworth and “Nothing but the Best” by Richard Packer. The *Evening Post* interviewed Ian Gordon who as chair of the New Zealand Literary Fund Advisory Committee had allocated funding to *Numbers*. Gordon was also Professor and Head of the English Department at Victoria University College and had just had a term of Vice Chancellor of the University of New Zealand. Gordon reportedly had said “the past performance of “Numbers” would not have led his committee to expect anything like the last issue” (cited by Johnson in *Numbers Ten* 9). Louis Johnson writes in his editorial in *Numbers Ten*, “These [stories about illicit love, strong drink and sex] had been themes in many of our previous articles. We think the Professor has slipped badly and foolishly here ... Our stories were not simply “about” any of these things, in that sense at all, and if the Professor believes them to have been then he should be no longer sitting on a Literary Fund Committee” (9).

What makes this whole controversy more interesting is that the copy of *Numbers Nine* that I have used has the name “I. A. Gordon” on the cover and lines highlighting what appear to be the more explicit sections of each of these stories. The only written comment on the stories is in the same writing as the name on the front of the magazine and reads: “J. C.



Sturm is the pen-name of Mrs James Baxter, a married woman with three children" (22). One can only speculate what prompted this comment, but it could be read that it deserves noting that a wife and mother (even if the number of children is wrong) should not be writing of such unseemly matters. Gordon and the reporters for *The Dominion* and *The Evening Post* seem to have missed the fact that this story is a comment on marriage as well as male/female relationships, and the effect that time and familiarity may have on a relationship leaving "nothing to share but a sour discontent ... no one is immune, nothing can stand against it ... we are all potential bankrupts" (18). Perhaps it is Sturm's acknowledgement that this is only a sexual interlude, that it is "For the Novelty" as her initial title indicates and that "society's" reaction (through the voices of Gordon, *The Dominion* and *The Evening Post*) reflect the double standards regarding female and male heterosexual sexual relationships which were prevalent in New Zealand for so long, and were also prevalent in the writing of Sargeson, Mulgan and Davin, where males appeared to be able to behave sexually with impunity whereas their female partners were regarded as, at the very least, wanton. I have been unable to identify who or what was responsible for the title change to "The Bankrupts" as this story becomes in *House of the Talking Cat*, but it is possible that as Sturm's reading public (albeit the public perhaps encompassing only the press and Gordon) having missed the point of the story, and the ending with "light-hungry moths giving themselves gladly to the burning lamp" (24) needed to be given more direction towards Sturm's intentions.

If Sturm sees that Sargeson's themes include the barrenness of male and female relationships, she sees Mulgan's themes, as well as encompassing those of Sargeson's, extending to ideas of isolation both as humans living in New Zealand, and also the isolation of New Zealand itself so far away from the centre of western culture. Davin, as cited by Sturm, states that Mulgan's concern "is the problem of how men are to live together" ("New Zealand Character" 29). Sturm sees that Mulgan's man alone feels responsible for everything around him, his wife, his family and his material possessions and that he feels "a jealous protection of everything [that] is essential to the maintenance of his position in his

social group" (38). Yet as well as feeling this jealous responsibility for his family, Sturm states that "Mulgan's man alone, whether he is married or not, is very much the New Zealand Bachelor" (42), a married man seeking the company of other men in the pub in order to escape from his wife and his family responsibilities. Sturm sees that in Mulgan's work, as in Sargeson's, the man-to-man relationship is easier and more companionable, it "excludes or opposes the world of women, the family, the domestic home life and all the accompanying constraints which make constant demands on a man's time and energy" (42). Sturm goes on to say that in Mulgan's writing "only in the free and easy company of other men who do not question his comings and goings, does he feel able to protect his shaky self-esteem" (42). Mulgan's Johnson is the epitome and the extreme of this bachelorhood as he remains never able to settle and always seeking the undemanding male company he finds in war. Sturm's stories describe the "women alone" as their "bachelor" husbands congregate together and many of her stories have "absent" husbands and fathers — "A Thousand and One Nights", "Where to Lady?", "First Native and Pink Pig" and "The Old Coat".

When the husband is present, as in "House of the Talking Cat" she describes domestic scenes where the husband and wife talk past each other. The wife, waits, "caught and helpless, in the web of her spinning dream" (56), the web of domesticity and familial expectations causing any dreams of a different life to spin away beyond reach, leaving little room beyond the daily drudgery for any demonstrable affection for her husband and children, nor they for her or each other. Thomas, the cat, receives not only all the affection, but also is the recipient of all the family's confidences. The story begins and ends with Thomas, being the common denominator for the family, as though the family only exists through Thomas' presence. Sturm's stories demonstrate that women are just as alone as men and that their isolation occurs within the family and everyday life. Although Mulgan and Davin see that the women have their relationships with their children as providing company and allies, Sturm demonstrates, particularly in "House of the Talking Cat" that this is not so. The family's day begins with Thomas "on the door mat ready for the day to take

him in" (48) and ends after midnight as the man puts out the milk bottles and Thomas acknowledges him and "was gone" (56). During the day Thomas provides the only warmth for the family as one by one, sister/brother, mother/daughter, mother/son and husband/wife, they reject each other's advances. The children fight over the cat, the mother braces herself against a hug from the daughter, and deliberately ignores the father's hints for an "early night" (55). Thomas, too, chooses at times to withhold his warmth, and punishes both the boy and the father with scratches when their approach to him is rougher than he prefers, reflecting that the blunt approaches of both father and son are also rejected by the busy mother. Again Sturm does not name her adult characters, which enables them to represent any, or every, man and woman.

The depiction of dysfunctional family relationships and situations continues with Sturm's evaluation of Davin's work, which much more than either Sargeson or Mulgan is about family relationships, often told from the perspective of the son in the family and as such many of his works relate the mother/son relationship. D. H Munro, in his review of *Roads from Home* broadens the concepts explored by Davin by writing "the theme is simply the human predicament" (290).

Sturm notes that Davin sees the woman as having "only limited insight into her husband's personal problems" ("New Zealand Character" 63). She sees that Davin, like Sargeson and Mulgan, describes the New Zealand Bachelor as a character to be admired for his "blokeiness" and ability to get on well with his mates, whereas Sturm flips this view to demonstrate the isolation that women may feel as a result. This isolation is reflected in the opening of "House of the Talking Cat" where the description of the early morning scene is a description of detritus of family life and begins another day which "lies in ambush" (48) — the ambush which awaits the woman at the hands of all her family and heralds another day to survive, rather than to enjoy.

Davin's stories, as in "Saturday Night" reflect families from a son's perspective and although they may be dysfunctional, this is from a male or a male child's perspective and shows the wife/mother having the control and power within the family. Sturm's families do not reflect any power or control being held by the wife/mother, they show a mother waiting to be "ambushed" or wanting to escape the isolation she feels. She shows this isolation in "Where to Lady?" where the narrator begins "It was my day off, or strictly speaking, my afternoon off. Not given, you understand, just taken. The best kind I told myself defiantly, walking firmly down the path, walking out on the house, the family, a long week of 'life's responsibilities" (25). However, unlike the men of Sargeson, Mulgan and Davin, there is no pub, no place where a woman can go to escape her domestic duties, as the narrator discovers, when she eventually finds herself in a "poky, cheap-looking, open twenty-four-hours-a-day kind of joint" (28) and from there has only one place to go ... "home" (32). Sturm writes that "Davin gives an excellent account of the married woman's position: her drive for security and status, her romantic ideals and fantasies" ("New Zealand Character" 64). However, in her own stories Sturm shows a different perspective of the married woman's position, one of drudgery, isolation and loneliness, Munro's "human predicament" as lived by women, perhaps.

Sturm's book reviews reflect a different aspect of Sturm as a social informer, showing an insight into her views of the writer's art. The book reviews which appeared in both *Numbers* and *Te Ao Hou* are written for two very different audiences, one being the very small literary-astute audience of subscribers to *Numbers* and the other being the very wide diverse audience of *Te Ao Hou* who were not necessarily as well read as the readers of *Numbers*. Sturm reviews, amongst many, *Katherine Mansfield: a biography* by Antony Alpers for *Numbers* and *Cry the Beloved Country* and *Too Late the Phalarope* by Alan Paton for *Te Ao Hou*. At the beginning of her review of *Katherine Mansfield* Sturm adopts a didactic tone instructing the readers in how she sees that they should approach this biography: "this then is the reader's job: to read the book with no reservations, to adopt at the time of reading, as best he can, Mr Alpers' viewpoint, forsaking all others; and to be

prepared to come out of it a convert to a new faith" ("Reviews: Refutation" 35). The religious fervour and echo of marriage vows indicates Sturm's approbation and indicates her personal stance to the book. However, in the same paragraph Sturm's writing becomes more colloquial as she notes the many previous biographies written by those who "have nibbled the same cheese" (35). This unexpected metaphor of Mansfield as the "cheese" and other reviewers and biographers as mice able only to nibble at the edge, could be seen as denigrating these previous Mansfield writers, or at least putting them very firmly in place. Sturm does not, however, become overawed by Alpers finding his determination to state only facts "irritating and unsatisfying" and she wishes "occasionally for a warmly expressed and purely private opinion, presented clearly as something quite apart from the facts" especially in terms of getting a sense of Mansfield the woman. However, Sturm is warm in her praise of Alpers' ability to "impart atmosphere" and to describe the literary context and times of Mansfield and her relationships. Sturm is not overawed by other reviewers and is prepared to criticise them as she does with Mr Frank Swinnerton's review mercilessly stating it "was obviously written after he had dined and wine too well, and with a brain urgently in need of more oxygen" (37).

In contrast Sturm's review of *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *To Late the Phalarope* adopts a more serious stance, despite being written in a more colloquial tone, undoubtedly in order to appeal to a different audience. However, Sturm is not afraid to demonstrate her passion, concerning the young South Africans "forced to leave a land too weakened by erosion and ignorant farming to support even the remnants of broken tribes" (53), exchanging "the peaceful poverty of their country homes for the violent poverty of a city that neither needs them or wants them, that cannot house them decently or feed them properly, that ignores them till they break the law that shows them little mercy" (53). She is equally passionate when writing about Mansfield's development, "we watch her art slowly emerging from its chrysalis case after a long winter of many storms ..." (37).

In the review of Paton's novels Sturm writes that "the author of a good novel should be primarily concerned with people and relationships" (53) and she praises Alpers for "his gift for describing relationships" (53). Sturm's own stories reflect this concern for people and relationships. In both reviews Sturm indicates her writing philosophy; in the Mansfield review where she writes that "the truth she [Mansfield] discovered stripped all the old beliefs away, and at Fontainebleau she was forced to accept what she had denied all her life, that living is more important than, and in the last simple analysis, fundamental to art" (37); and in the review of *Too Late the Phalarope* where she writes "Insight and understanding are more necessary in a writer than cleverness or even style" (54).

These reviews provide an opportunity to reflect on the influence that other writers may have had on Sturm's own writing. Sturm commented that in her "middle to late twenties I 'discovered' Katherine Mansfield. I was completely bowled over" (Woods interview 176). In an interview with Potiki some twelve years later she identifies the three influences on her writing as being Mansfield, Sargeson and Frame. I have already commented on the some of the common themes and ideas which Sturm shared with Sargeson, it is now timely to consider some of the commonalities Sturm's early writing shares with the short stories of Mansfield.

Berkman identified four themes in Mansfield's New Zealand short stories which she saw as "furnishing the thematic substance of her entire body of work" (49). These themes she identified as being "escape from the oppressions of reality (but there never is escape); the sensitive apprehensions of the child, leading often to shock; the falseness and stupidity of contemporary social herds; the painful nature of all sexual relationships" (49). These themes are all reflected in Sturm's work; "escaping the oppressions of reality" can be seen in "Where to, Lady?" and "The Old Coat"; "the falseness and stupidity of contemporary social herds" is seen in "The Dance" and "For All The Saints"; and "the painful nature of all sexual relationships" is seen in "The Bankrupts" and "The Earrings". Sturm tends not to deal with

children in the same way as Mansfield, except in “First Native and Pink Pig” and “Jerusalem, Jerusalem”, although these stories do not have the shock element of Mansfield’s, rather the reader is left in “First Native and Pink Pig” understanding the inadequacies of the well-meaning mother and the sorrow of the child who realises that he must now protect her, and in “Jerusalem, Jerusalem” the inequalities of, and harsh judgements held by, New Zealand society of the Depression years.

Just as Sturm often felt the outsider and “a minority of one”, Angela Smith writes of Mansfield “The idea of outcast and exile as the part of self was familiar to her from her life in New Zealand” (xvii). Mansfield herself wrote “I am always conscious of this secret disruption in me” (*Letters* 260). Smith sees that for Mansfield what was being displaced was “the norm of realism” (xvii). In Sturm’s work this sense of displacement and disruption is described most fully in “Where to, Lady?” when the narrator feels herself unsettled from the very first moments of her visit to friends and although “[t]he room steadied itself around me” (26), she finds comfort in the “book of short stories I knew better than any friends” (27), (the book being readily identifiable as being written by Mansfield). In this story, Sturm has her narrator looking to replace her daily realities, the “social realism” with something else, however, for the narrator the starkness of her reality will always pervade.

Sargeson commented in an interview in 1970 that “instead of opening up something for New Zealand, Mansfield and myself have tended to be constricting influences. I mean who wants all of life to be seen in terms of Mansfield or Sargeson?” (Cunningham 154). Although, through her themes and writing style, Sturm does not seem constrained, rather she appears to be stimulated and inspired by them. However, Wevers notes “[t]hat for twenty or more years after the first publication of this interview the short story in New Zealand’s literary magazines, anthologies and published collections was dominated by Sargeson’s presence and by male writers” (72). Thus although providing some influence to Sturm, Mansfield, and even more so Sargeson, may have also contributed to her inability to find publishers after

the fifties, as Sturm's social realism was perhaps a little too real, a little too close to the bone for New Zealand at that time.

Sturm describes in her thesis that the writer who is a social informer is able to detach themselves from the social position they hold so that they can move from a subjective to an objective recorder of their world. However, it will become more obvious in the next two chapters that there are times when Sturm chooses to take a particular, non-objective stance in order that the mirror she holds up can truly reflect the emotions and realities which some people may experience. It will be seen that Sturm — social informer, Sturm — woman writer, and Sturm — Maori writer, are divisions which, whilst useful to explore Sturm's work, can also be limiting if we see them as being exclusive ways of reading her work.



### Chapter 3: J. C. Sturm Woman Writer — “Writing against the current”

“Writing against the current” is a phrase Virginia Woolf uses in her diary to describe how she felt as a woman trying to find a place for herself in the literary world of Britain in the twenties and thirties (quoted in Barrett, 4). This struggle was familiar to many women throughout the world who were writing prior to the later twentieth century, not least to J. C. Sturm. Sturm however, just as she resisted classification and the consequential expectations for writers because of ethnicity, also resisted them because of gender. A writer, she said, “should be allowed to do what their emotional memory tells them to do ... with all the passion in the world. Never mind about their ethnicity, never mind about their gender, just let them do it” (*Broken Journey*).

Sturm’s early writing, often described as “domestic realism” (Gadd, Wevers), undoubtedly presents a woman’s perspective on life in the fifties. Feminist writing was not identified as a genre in the fifties, particularly in New Zealand (although that is not to say that there were not women writing in this manner), there being no identification of such a term at that time. Although defining and discussing Sturm as a feminist writer (even if with twenty-first century or even late twentieth century hindsight) is tempting, I have resisted that label, instead choosing to discuss Sturm as a woman writer. In 1991, in his introduction to *Oxford History of New Zealand Literature*, Terry Sturm identifies that there is a form of specifically “serious women’s literature”, (still not identified as “feminist writing”), which is the writing from the seventies forward, saying, “... its main tendency has been oppositional, challenging male accounts of New Zealand society and culture” (xii). This definition of serious writing in the seventies certainly fits the stories Sturm is telling in the fifties as they are “oppositional” and they do challenge “male accounts”. Contextually, New Zealand in the fifties was, in common with much of the western world, struggling to return to “normality” following the disruptions and devastations of the two World Wars and the Depression which all occurred within only forty years. The “normality” could not be, however, that which had been known

before the First World War nor even that which was known before the Second. A new society needed to be forged as much had changed, not only for the returning soldiers, young men aged by their war experiences, but also for the women who had been thrust into an independence and to experiences which would never have happened so rapidly in more normal times. This period after the war became a time when the populace needed a period of calm consolidation before the time of challenge and growth of the late sixties.

The nature of the restrictive roles for women in (particularly white middle-class) society had always been of concern to some women and were written about as early as 1792 when Mary Wollstonecroft published *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in which she expanded on her views that women should strive for independence and not be bound by the conventions that society expected of them. This struggle began to gather impetus in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries around the world as women began to agitate for the right to vote and for equal access to education. During the period from the 1890s to the early twentieth century women did attain the right to vote, but any movements to further advance rights for women took second place to the outbreak of the First World War. However the war meant that women were called on to fill many roles and a great number of women experienced real emancipation and independence for the first time. Many of the gains made for women's independence were lost however, as the Great Depression which followed the war meant for many women a struggle to survive took precedence over further demands for equality. The Depression was barely over before the Second World War broke out which again, despite the tragedy and casualties of war itself, did provide a fresh opportunity for women to be independent and to take on new roles and experiences for themselves. In describing the period after the Second World War, Michael King in *The Penguin History of New Zealand* quotes the American Joseph Adelson:

we sought all of us, men and women alike, to replenish ourselves in goods and spirits ... the men would be secure in stable careers, the women in comfortable homes and

together they would raise perfect children ... [It was] the idyll of suburban domesticity ... (413).

It was in these “idyllic” times that J. C. Sturm started to write her short stories, some of which challenged the reality of this “idyll” and questioned the comfort of women in their suburban homes. This was twenty years before what has become known as the second wave of feminism and at this time was known as “women’s liberation” which, as Michael King writes, came about “because of what most women — and many men — could see was the second-class status of women in such areas as employment opportunities, rates of pay, excessive domestic responsibilities and education” (*History* 462). The issues which Sturm emphasises as a “woman” writer and which I discuss here are the “excessive domestic responsibilities”, domestic violence, double standards for men and women and loss of self in the course of becoming a wife and mother as demonstrated in “The Old Coat”, “One Thousand and One Nights”, “For the Novelty”/“The Bankrupts”<sup>2</sup>, “The Earrings” and “Where to, Lady”. All except two (“The Old Coat” and “The glass house”) of Sturm’s stories which I classify as her “woman stories” were included in the first part of *House of the Talking Cat*.

Sturm makes two groupings of the stories in *House of the Talking Cat*, the first group of stories can be seen, through a range of different protagonists, as following the progression of many young women’s lives from first sexual encounter to looking after the children, two different experiences of afternoons out, one of which is planning an affair, and to being alone in her house with only the housework and the family cat. Only one of these stories, “The Dance”, shows young women in situations with their husbands present and socialising with a group of friends, but even then the story is redolent of misunderstandings and misremembering; losing a tennis court “was like something we’d all had a long time ago but forgotten so that we couldn’t recognise it when we found it again” (41). The relationships

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<sup>2</sup> Although this story was published under both titles, as “For the Novelty” in *Numbers* and “The Bankrupts” in *House of the Talking Cat* in this chapter I will refer to and reference it as “The Bankrupts”.

are fraught with flirtations, silences, self-centredness and intolerances. Another story, “The glass house” is not included in *House of the Talking Cat* because, Sturm said, “it would have thrown the whole book out of balance” (Interview with Potiki 3). However, it also has a husband present and describes Sturm’s most companionable relationship between a husband and wife although each is very aware that they do not understand each other’s “inner rooms”(16, 28).

“The Old Coat” was the first short story Sturm had published when it appeared in *Numbers* in 1954. This story was not included in her collection for *House of the Talking Cat* but has remained as a story on its own, largely forgotten until very recently. Although contextually it fits with the “wife and mother” stories in part one of *House of the Talking Cat* I have chosen to begin this discussion with it for not only does it dispel the myth of the “idyll of suburban domesticity” it does so in a truly gothic fashion turning the idea of an old coat, comfortable, familiar and secure into a frightening symbol of a fear which must be destroyed. The story begins on a calm summer’s evening with the children safely in bed, a scene of safe domesticity shared by the narrator and Mrs Simmons. However, this safety is dispelled before the end of the first paragraph when the knocking noise, which at first irritates rather than concerns, suddenly changes to something more ominous as the narrator sees an expression of alarm on Mrs Simmons’ face and feels the “first prickles of fear moisten the palms of my hands” (22). Mrs Simmons recognises the sounds and explains that it is a “visitation” which has not only happened before, but appears to be almost expected (22). The gothic scene is now set with the haunting of an old house, a young woman at risk and possibly secrets about to be exposed, or hidden further. “Visitation” implies the appearance of a divine or supernatural being. However, nothing appears, there is only noise. The presence of a witness, Mrs Simmons, to this, and her assertion that “it has happened before” ensures that the reader is clear that the narrator is describing a real event; it is not just the imagining of an over-sensitive young woman. As the narrator and the elderly, frail Mrs Simmons slam shut the kitchen door, a dark blur is all that is seen. The two succeed in keeping the door shut against this loud unknown violence through “strength of purpose”,

two slight women working together against an unseen, but perhaps known, enemy (22). The noise stops and the “unseen force ... gives out” (22). However, the danger is not over and the narrator again feels fear as her “palms prickle and moisten” once more (23). The repetition of the description emphasises the feeling of terror this haunting engenders and also prepares the reader to believe that this experience is likely to be repeated. She finds a piece of material which she recognises as being from an old worn coat which is used for sitting on outside. The increasingly dark atmosphere intensifies the dread the two women feel as the coat, which should be familiar and comfortable and offering protection is now lying on the floor, rather than where it is kept in the “damp smelling dark corner” inhabited by rats and spiders (23). The narrator looking at it, and seeing how it has come out of its dark space to take on a new form as something disturbing, frightening and violent, is reminded of other falsehoods, of all the things in her life that have not been as they first appeared, the “impositions and mockeries and pretences and lies and bad jokes” she has had to tolerate and she becomes enraged (23). In true gothic style the coat is revealed as a symbol, a symbol of the oppression of domesticity and the life that she is forced to live. As this rage leaves her she suddenly remembers her children, and picking up a knife for protection, rushes to check on them. They are safe, but she knows that the “visitation”, the haunting, has been in their room, that the children too, have lost the illusion that their lives are familiar, safe and protected, and they are victims of the darkness and the haunting. The rage engulfs her again, she “was both afraid and elated, prepared to grapple with any monster” (23). However, all that was there was the old coat, which she then saw was alive and had “become the embodiment of anything I had ever known that was mean and cruel and maliciously destructive”, and she realised that the knife that she had picked up to defend her children was “the thin blade of domesticity that will turn or snap against any obstacle it meets” (24). Although Mrs Simmons has been present for this “visitation”, indicative that all women may feel the oppression of domesticity, she, like most women of the time, accepts it and suppresses the feelings of oppression and injustice, convinced that by ignoring these feelings they can pretend that all is well. Mrs Simmons says “I think we had better stay” which can mean women have no choice but to stay still and quiet and accept their lot (23). The narrator chooses to fight against it, but finds that her anger, her

righteous indignation which has protected her in the past is not enough, and the energy this anger brings is “squandered shouting at echoes” (24). The narrator is alone and isolated, and the self-confidence she thought she could rely on is insufficient. The fight against domestic oppression is a lonely one. The total absence of any male in the story, by actual presence or reference, demonstrates that this is a woman’s issue, that there is a gulf between women and men which means that women must deal with their oppression alone. This fight against the old coat may also be interpreted as the fight that women may have in achieving their desire to write. Virginia Woolf describes it thus:

... the obstacles against her [the woman writer] are still immensely powerful — and yet they are very difficult to define. Outwardly what is simpler than to write books? Outwardly what obstacles are there for a woman rather than for a man? Inwardly, I think the case is very different, she still has many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome. Indeed it will be a long time still, I think, before a woman can sit down to write a book without finding a phantom to be slain, a rock to be dashed against. (*On Women and Writing* 62)

The old coat may well represent the obstacles, the ghosts, the prejudices, the phantoms and the rocks that Woolf is alluding to; the difficulty in finding publishers, an understanding and receptive reading public, and endorsement from her gender and her writing peers.

This story was not republished until 2012<sup>3</sup>. It did not appear in *House of the Talking Cat* and appears to now be relatively unknown. It is a story out of its time not only because it addresses the oppressive nature of the lives that many women led, and perhaps some still do, but also for the gothic form the story takes. The only critical mention of it I have found is by Jennifer Sturm in her thesis *Browner and Stronger — an Examination of the Writing of J. C. Sturm* in which she devotes one paragraph to this story, describing it as a “psycho-drama”

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<sup>3</sup> *Anthology of New Zealand Literature* edited by Jane Stafford and Mark Williams and published in late 2012 contains the first republishing of “The Old Coat”. I am glad to see that the silence that had greeted this story to date has been broken.

(29). And psycho-drama it certainly is; one could see the scene Sturm sets in this story at the beginning of many a modern movie, and in this respect, as well as its subject matter, it is a story told well before its time. Perhaps this is the reason it was not republished earlier. It was a story so far ahead of its time, that the time had not yet arrived for it to be understood.

It is likely that Sturm's views on women's right to independence and the oppressive bonds of domesticity were influenced not only by her life with the Sturms, the experiences she saw as Mrs Sturm and her fellow Salvation Army members tended to the poor before and during the Depression and the experiences she may have heard of as a member of the Maori Women's Welfare League, but also from the novels she read and the ideas she formulated in writing her thesis.

The concept of the New Zealand Bachelor which Sturm postulated in her thesis and is discussed in the previous chapter also has relevance in this chapter as seldom do husbands feature in the domestic lives of her women. The "New Zealand Bachelor", that is the married man who escapes domesticity and married responsibilities by escaping to his mates, often in the pub, is exemplified and developed most in Sturm's story "One Thousand and One Nights" where the husband's escape to, and return from the pub takes on a sinister undercurrent. In *Browner and Stronger*, Jennifer Sturm cites a letter she received from J. C. Sturm in which she defines the tone of her writing as "the predicament of individuals caught up in situations beyond their control, and which marginalise them painfully" (51). This tone can be seen in "One Thousand and One Nights", Sturm's public reading of which led to the publication of *House of the Talking Cat*. The title of this story immediately takes the reader into the fantasy world of *The Arabian Nights* and to the tale of Scheherazade desperately telling stories to her husband, the ruler, who having been betrayed by his first wife trusts no woman, and has his wives put to death the morning after marriage before they can have a chance to betray him. Scheherazade, desperate to find a way out of the predicament she has been forced into by her father, tells a story every night but does not complete it, so that

the ruler, eager to hear the end of the story keeps her alive for a thousand and one nights. The title thus not only reflects the desperation of Scheherazade determined to stay alive, but alerts the reader to the tales which may be within this tale, to read between the lines. The story opens with a scene of apparent domestic tranquility, and like "The Old Coat" this illusion of tranquility is shattered early when the reader is alerted to the mother's pretence. The characters are nameless, the woman/mother, the little girl, the toddler and he/Daddy. That the tranquility is an illusion is emphasised by the repetition of "pretending" as though the mother has to keep reminding herself that all is not as it seems, that there is impending danger. The little girl's play and creation of her pretend cakes, the mud pies that are "too pretty to eat", are echoes of the pretence, for if you took a bite the illusion would be lost and you would be left with the dry dust of reality in your mouth (19). Sturm details the activities of the afternoon, hour by hour, a countdown to fear. At three o'clock the toddler wakes and is brought outside, reminding his sister of Hunca Munca, a mouse in the Beatrix Potter story "The Tale of Two Bad Mice." This story becomes the second tale within a tale, demonstrating the palimpsest nature of this story, the layering of the pretences. "The Tale of Two Bad Mice" is a tale of two mice, Tom Thumb and his wife Hunca Munca, becoming angry when they find a beautiful doll's house is not real and destroy or steal the contents.

The children have a "pretend picnic" in their own garden while their mother watches trying to pretend the tranquility of the domestic scene is real. The little girl runs around in a child's fantasy, galloping like the horse she can become when she kicks off the restrictive boots which she wears to strengthen her ankles. She is able to escape the restriction she lives with, in sharp contrast to her mother who is trapped in her restrictive, imprisoning life. The little girl then pretends to be a tree, turning into a bird, and again demonstrates her easy ability to escape through imagination, an avenue unavailable to her mother, for whom imagination can only take her into her worst fears. The little girl demonstrates the joy which her childish innocence allows her, again contrasting with her mother's frightening reality. The male toddler, however, is not contrasted with his father, but rather his stumbles echo the ominous stumbles later in the evening as 'he' returns. This contrasting of the



daughter/mother and echoing son/father provides a view that our futures are almost predetermined and inescapable neither society nor genetics allowing an escape from the gender-allocated positions in life.

The countdown continues when at four o'clock the little family goes inside and the tension increases as "the cold crept out of the bush on the other side of the house and hid in the darkened rooms waiting for them" (20). The warmth of a home is not present in this house. Lighting the fire proves difficult with "only a small flame struggling" which reflects the struggle the mother is having in trying to build a home when there is always the presence of imminent danger (21). The countdown continues as the mother cooks dinner and responds to her daughter's chatter about whether or not all daddies miss their dinner, and the tension builds. The evening routines involve the reading of "The Two Bad Mice" before the children go to bed, emphasising the parallel between the beautiful doll's house not being real to the apparent, the calm which appears to exist as the children are settled for the night actually hiding something quite different. The reader is aware of the continuing countdown to ten o'clock with hints of the impending danger. "She thought of having a bath but it seemed a bit risky — a bath wasn't a good place to be caught ... but she didn't want to go to bed in case it happened again" (23). The waiting goes on with the woman's fear mounting until "he" arrives home and falls asleep, leaving the woman "in the small space between one waiting and the next", the waiting which is likely to be repeated for a thousand and one nights, unless there can be a miracle and she could turn into the bird of her daughter's pretence and fly away (24).

Sturm does not name the danger which the reader is able to identify as domestic violence, but allows this story to demonstrate what she describes as "obliquity" where, "I can say what I want to say but not once refer to it" (Wood 181). In this story the reader sees the loneliness of the woman, the isolation of her life, and the impact of New Zealand "Bachelorhood," but Sturm is explicit about the small space in which women may find

themselves, and which she identifies. The space in this story is even more frightening than the space in “The Old Coat” for this space is not empty; this space has been invaded by the unspoken danger of domestic violence.

In 1928 Woolf wrote “Chastity had then, it has even now, a religious importance in a woman’s life, and has so wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts that to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage of the rarest” (*Room* 58). Sturm demonstrates this rare courage in “The Bankrupts” and “The Earrings”, both of which have been discussed briefly in the previous chapter where I have described the result Sturm experienced when writing in fifties New Zealand about a young woman demonstrating such lack of chastity. In “The Bankrupts” Sturm describes two relationships, the first being the tentative relationship between a comparatively innocent young woman and a more experienced man, and the second between the young woman’s parents, as described through the young woman’s eyes. Both relationships seem doomed, the young couple because of the man’s superficiality and dismissive comment about not only the gardens, but also about his companion, “charming place ... just like a pretty woman who will charm you and charm you but won’t or can’t take the matter any further” (10) and the parents who still live their lives together, but “in sour discontent” (12). It is the man’s comment which seems to seal for the young woman that this is a meaningless relationship. He has not realised the importance of this place to her, and she is obviously just another in a long line of hopeful conquests to him. Having recognised this, the young woman still continues with the evening despite “the trouble that had been lying in ambush for them ... who knew how long” (11). She debates with herself, fully aware now of how the evening will end, knowing that whether or not she does go to bed with him the relationship is over. The sexual tension which had existed between them and formed the foundation of their relationship had found release in their coupling, will soon burn itself out, like the moths fluttering around the light. Sturm’s use of the moth motif throughout this story demonstrates the inevitability of the events, not only for the young couple, but also for the parents who have a life wasted in “old grudges and resentment” (12). However, despite knowing the outcome, the young

woman is unrepentant. She knows what she is doing like “the light-hungry moths giving themselves gladly to the burning lamp above” (18), hoping to escape a future of regret like her parents. In this story Sturm has relieved chastity of its “religious importance,” allowing premarital sex to be an experience a young woman may experience with the same lack of judgement as a male. Instead of criticising the sexual experience of the young woman, Sturm is making a comment about relationships which become meaningless or resentful, whether for the young or for the old.

In “The Earrings” the sexual issue is not chastity but the sanctity of marriage, with the wife planning a sexual liaison. Sturm leaves the husband at home doing the domestic chores and looking after the baby while the wife prepares for her afternoon out, leaving him with instructions for the baby’s care and dressed in her best with seldom-worn earrings adorning her ears readying herself to subvert the sanctity of marriage. Sturm allows the husband a “faint smile” when he notices the earrings, but whether it is a smile of recognition or acknowledgement is up to the reader (43). The liaison fumbles and stalls before it ever gets under way when the young woman says that she has told her husband about the meeting. The man “holds himself straighter than usual and the expression on his face was grim as though he had come to an important decision and was bent on putting it into action” (44). It is as though the young woman has reminded him of his duties as a “New Zealand Bachelor” with responsibility and loyalty to his mate which he had previously forgotten, in sharp contrast to the young woman feeling any responsibility or loyalty to her husband. However, by leaving the man in control in this situation, leaving the man as the sole final decision maker, Sturm demonstrates further the lesser power that a woman actually has over sexual matters. The man, although obviously willing to consider a dalliance with a young wife and mother, demonstrates his scathing opinion of such women when describing the creator of a mask as “probably done by some suburban housewife trying to escape from the boredom of her spare time” (45). Sturm presents this story as though she is going to allow a change in this dominance. She names her female protagonist, whereas in all her other stories in the first part of *House of the Talking Cat* and in the “The Old Coat” the female protagonists are

not named, including “The glass house” where Mrs Wright is not graced with a forename and all the other characters are. In “The Earrings” the wife, husband and child are all named, but the man she is meeting is not. So although Sturm has allowed her protagonist to appear to have sexual freedom in an era when it was publicly disallowed, she then demonstrates the reality that even here, the final decision, the ultimate power remains with the man, who by his very namelessness becomes ‘every man’, and who, although giving some excitement to housewives’ boring lives, allows his ultimate loyalty to remain to the husband he potentially had assisted in betraying. In presenting what at first glimpse appears to be a subversion of the sexual mores of the fifties Sturm emphasises once again the dominant role the male had in society.

“Where to, Lady?” succinctly summarises the position of an educated young woman in fifties’ society who is expected to know her place as a wife and mother and to be satisfied with that role whilst struggling to find more in her life and is unable to know where to find it. The story describes the narrator’s afternoon and evening away from the responsibilities of her family in a series of vignettes which show her attempts to not only find somewhere to go, but to find somewhere she not only fits in but where she can be herself, not merely a wife and mother. As she makes this gesture of independence she describes the scene below her in domestic metaphors, denying in herself the ability she attributes to Joyce Cary of being able to translate pictures into words; the harbour “[m]aybe a huge earthenware bowl with a chipped rim and a puddle of pale blue milk in the bottom” and “it was a perfect day, one right out of the box, all clean and fresh and carefully ironed hanging up waiting for someone to step into” (25). Sturm’s choice of Cary as the writer admired by the protagonist is interesting, in that Cary had published in 1946 his novel *The Moonlight* which tells the story of three sisters and their planning to marry off a niece. Allen (1970) described the novel as being “memorable as a study in the change of women’s attitudes to sex and romantic love” (25). This change in attitude was not reflected in New Zealand literature or society as demonstrated in Gordon’s reaction to “For the Novelty”. Amanda’s decision, in Cary’s novel’ to raise her child as a single working mother in London is a decision which

would have caused much disapprobation in New Zealand making such a decision virtually impossible without strong parental support which Amanda was lacking. Even married women in New Zealand in the fifties had to choose between marriage and a career which could mean sacrificing personal fulfilment for social acceptance. That Cary's descriptive powers are recognised by the protagonist furthers my contention that Sturm was aware of this novel for Allen continues, in commenting that in *The Moonlight* Cary demonstrates a "much increased visual intensity of style" (25).

The protagonist wonders where to spend her stolen time and reflects on her difficulty of moving from one world, a domestic world, into any other. When the tram conductor asks "Where to, Lady?" she has no answer. Sturm's capitalisation of "lady" may indicate the tone used by the conductor, emphasising the word and demonstrating by this emphasis the conductor's view that the protagonist is not a lady. This sharpness of voice and tone is not continued when he sees the protagonist's confusion and he allows her time to recover, referring to her as "lady" without the capitalisation (25). She decides to visit her nearest friends and arrives to be greeted by a hostess who is a "little vague". The protagonist too seems vague, as the room "steadied itself around" her, and she "tried to think back over the years to her last meal" (26). She becomes even more discomforted by the man showing her his book on cosmology stating that "it draws all the strands together, shuts all the doors, answers all the questions" (27). The protagonist does not want all the answers and doors shut, for if that happens she has no hope of more in her life than she already has as a wife and mother, there remains nothing to yearn for.

Although the protagonist is feeling unsettled, Sturm smoothly links the transitions in the story. As the protagonist says "not my cup of tea at all" she is offered tea from a "doll-sized teapot" which then links to the "book of short stories I knew better than any friends" — the short stories of Katherine Mansfield, and then enables, through the man's criticism of Mansfield, to make a link to Kafka, "Honestly, you'd think life was a sequence from a Kafka

novel" (27). This reference reflects exactly the disorientation and alienation that the protagonist is feeling, and puts the lie to the man's comment for life should not seem surreal and transforming. It is the man's suspicious glance that causes the young woman to bring her visit to an end, saying "I've imposed my appetite upon you too many times ... After all it's getting rather stupid" (27). The reader is left to decide whether the protagonist's appetite is for company or intellectual discussion, for books or food, or just a place to escape to, and to determine what exactly is "rather stupid" — is it that she escapes one domestic situation just to visit another? Is it that she wants to have an intellectual discussion but finds the man's self-assured assertions boorish?

The young woman leaves and continues to search for somewhere to go, but seems to be ambushed by memories as she stands outside a grill room, "and my mind reeled back to a different age, and a different me standing on the same spot with another all lost forever a lifetime ago" (28). To try to shake off these memories she enters and takes a chair offered to her by a "half-caste Maori woman" (29). The ensuing conversation suggests that the protagonist, too, is Maori, the comment "low-caste pakehas" not likely to be one which could be made to a Pakeha, especially one frequenting an "open-twenty-four-hours-a-day kind of joint" (28, 29). This is confirmed when the woman comes back from the kitchen and asks if the protagonist is willing to assist with the dishes in the over-busy kitchen, a question she would be very unlikely to put to a Pakeha woman. The realisation that the protagonist is Maori makes sense then of the conductor's ironic use of "Lady" when he greets her on the tram. The shock discovery that the protagonist is Maori now allows the reader to understand more the protagonist's early sense of unreality and displacement, the disrespect in the conductor's tone stays with her, and causes her to wonder where she does belong. The kitchen is busy and shows the young woman that there may be worse positions to be in, worse fates than sacrificing personal fulfilment: "Home, I thought ruefully, was never like this" (30). It is only towards the end of the evening when the young woman's name is mentioned, at the end of the evening when all the possibilities of the early afternoon are extinguished and she stops being every woman, and realises she is Sally with no chance of

transformation or metamorphosis into anything but a young wife and mother, “Kafka, I thought savagely. Kafka nothing” (32). In the taxi she is again asked “Where to, lady?”. This time the question not posed with any hidden agenda, without insult intended, and Sally can only say “Home”(32). She leaves the city lights and the taunting juke box playing “Oh you’ll never get away, you’ll never *get* away, you’ll never get away, you’ll never get away (28), knowing that unlike men with their comradeship and the pub, there is no sanctuary for women, no place to escape to. Wevers comments that “ ‘Home’ in short fiction by women, is represented as the place in which the female self-hood is most clearly recognised and where it is most at risk ... home is a place of continuous reinvention of place and condition” (“History of the Short Story” 181). Although she is referring to short fiction writing in the seventies and eighties, Sturm is demonstrating this idea of ‘home’ some twenty years earlier, ‘home’ in her stories is a place of drudgery, danger, confusion and bitterness, and sometimes a woman’s only sanctuary.

Sturm’s clever use of literary allusions brings a layering of meaning adding an extra dimension to her writing, which encourages the reader to work at all the implications of her story, to understand her “obliquity” and to respond to the issues and concerns she raises when read as a woman writer. Her references to Mansfield and “The Doll’s House” in “Where to, Lady?” is an echo of the doll’s house in “One Thousand and One Nights” and the Arabian Nights references are carried from “One Thousand and One Nights” to “The glass house”. The scornful repetition of the Kafka reference in “Where to, Lady?” shows Sally’s understanding that she has no identity other than that at home, as a mother and wife, it demonstrates that she knows she can have no self-fulfilment or dreams other than that she may find in her “home”.

“Where to, Lady?” was included in *Good-bye to Romance* an anthology of stories by New Zealand and Australian women written between 1930 to 1980. The editors, Webby and Wevers, note that “the dominant and dominating story form of women writers up until the

1920s and 1930s is the romance, a form which made the short story predominantly a vehicle for reassurance, a reaffirmation of life's great pattern ending at the church door" (1). Sturm's stories are among the first to be classed as social realism, but a social realism which shows a reality that sees the family and the household as more than a place of constraint and drudgery, that the home can be a place of danger and that marriage can be institution which rather than offering security means loss of self and opportunities, and becomes an institution which marginalises and places women outside of a society which offers a career and self-fulfilment. Furthermore, if one is a young Maori woman it becomes even more marginalising, as it also becomes a place of ambiguity where the not belonging can thrust one into the kitchen of "a poky, cheap-looking open-twenty-four-hours-a-day kind of joint"( "Where to, Lady?" 28).

In 1989 Michael Gifkins in a review of *Goodbye to Romance* bemoaned "the loss to New Zealand letters of a full flowering by J. C. Sturm" (126). His comment was reprimanded by Marion Evans who wrote "J. C. Sturm is alive. She has never stopped writing" (116). Both were incorrect; Sturm did "fully flower" in the years after Gifkins' review; and despite Evans' assertion, she had indeed stopped writing. However, much else was correct in their discussions of *Goodbye to Romance* in general and Sturm in particular, with their comments on the development of women's writing in New Zealand and about Sturm's personal circumstances. Evans summed up noting that it would be beneficial if there could be more discussion on the issues involved in the development of women's writing, "particularly of the needs of writers with life patterns like J. C. Sturm's" (116).

However, thirty years earlier in the fifties in New Zealand there was little discussion on the needs of women writers, so that Sturm did have many of Woolf's ghosts to fight and prejudices to overcome; she wrote against the current, but it is to be hoped that with twenty-first century hindsight and the tide-change that has accompanied the development



of women's writing, we can now correctly place Sturm with her peers in the forefront of women writers of that post-Second World War period.

#### Chapter 4: J. C. Sturm — Maori Writer: “A way of feeling”

In 1978 Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera contributed short articles which made up a chapter entitled “The Maori in Literature”, part of *Tihe Mauri Ora: aspects of Maoritanga* edited by Michael King. Ihimaera explained that he “wrote about the landscapes of the heart, the emotional landscapes which make Maori people what they are” (84). Grace, in explaining that she did not want to set herself up as a Maori “authority”, wrote “I’ll only say that I know what my own feelings are and that in writing I want to work at a feelings level” (80). These comments reflect Sturm’s own views about Maori writing which she expressed in the interview with Briar Woods. “I consider myself a Maori writer, whether my work has any Maori content or not because we are talking about a way of looking, a way of feeling and a way of being” (180).

In this chapter I will discuss Sturm as a Maori writer, reflecting as much as possible on Sturm’s own words when describing herself as a Maori writer and what she said she was trying to achieve in her work. It is important to remember however, that Sturm’s own words, apart from those in her works of the fifties and sixties, are from interviews and articles produced by her some thirty to forty years after the writing I am considering in this thesis had been completed. Therefore in this discussion of Sturm, Maori writer, I need to consider the context of Maori writing in this earlier period and also what was being written about Maori writing at both this time and what was written about this period of Maori writing in later critical works. This approach of viewing Sturm as a Maori writer in the context of the fifties and with the benefit of hindsight may mean we are able to place Sturm more firmly where she belongs as a Maori writer in the New Zealand literary canon as well as possibly casting more light on to her writing silence.

After the Second World War the returning servicemen had a dramatic change in their outlook and expectations in life. Men of the officer corps of the 28<sup>th</sup> Maori Battalion “no longer believed in the inevitability or even the sustainability of the Maori rural idyll” (King, *Penguin History of New Zealand* 471). Migration of Maori from their turangawaewae and their marae more than doubled in the early post-war years and for some these links with their whakapapa become much more difficult to sustain. This increasing urbanisation meant that Maori culture became less meaningful in the lives of those who had moved to the towns as their struggle to adjust to these very lives, find employment and raise their families became their primary preoccupation. The Department of Maori Affairs became increasingly involved in providing leadership for Maori.

Although Evans in *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature* states that “Maori writing was ‘created’ in the late Sixties ...” (218), Maori writing in English was being published before this, initially in newspapers and journals and then in the Department of Maori Affairs journal *Te Ao Hou*. Some exploration of the history of *Te Ao Hou* is warranted as the vehicle which initially gave Sturm her voice. There had been others promulgating the need for a national Maori magazine many years before the publication of *Te Ao Hou* in 1953, most notably Professor I. L. G. Sutherland in an essay entitled “The Maori Situation”, part of a collection he edited in 1940 to mark the centennial of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, *The Maori People Today: A General Survey*<sup>4</sup>. He wrote that a publication could “take the form of a periodical news sheet for Maoris and those engaged in all branches of the Maori service” (439). There was interest within the Department of Maori Affairs for the publication of a Maori journal and this interest was transformed into the first edition in 1953 by Erik Schwimmer who was working in the department at that time. Schwimmer remained the editor until 1961 when he was briefly replaced by Bruce Mason and then Margaret Orbell from 1962 until 1966 and Joy Stevenson until its final publication in 1975; all four of these editors being Pakeha despite the avowed intent of the publication to promote Maori writing

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<sup>4</sup>Sturm moved to Canterbury University in 1947 in order to study under Professor Sutherland who was the professor of Philosophy and Psychology there at this time.

and culture. Although he needed to write much of the first edition himself “to start the ball rolling” (91), Schwimmer encouraged contributions from Maori contributors in both English and Maori and instituted short story writing competitions. Under his editorship Sturm had a total of ten pieces, articles, book reviews and short stories, published during the fifties.

These pieces reflect the range of Sturm’s writing as well as the range of her own interests which extended from membership of the Maori Women’s Welfare League and Ngati Poneke to the Maori Education Foundation and literature for children as well as adults. By examining these works we are able to see her ability to communicate in a range of styles and content to a broad spectrum of society, both Maori and Pakeha.

Her first article in 1955 was included in a section called “Women’s World” and was entitled simply “The Maori Women’s Welfare League”. In this article Sturm details the short history of the League since its founding in 1951 and answers the question as to why Maori women needed to form their own organisation rather than to join the already existing European women’s organisations:

The answer is, that a few of them did become members of European organisations, but these few were Maori adapted in some degree to European life, and with some point of contact with Pakeha women in their community; friendship, education, or a Pakeha background to their upbringing. But the rest, and that means the majority, who had no such point of contact, felt too diffident or self-conscious to confess the inadequacies of their homes to a group of Pakeha women, who were in the most cases sympathetic or at least interested but who had no first-hand experience of such difficulties ... Maori women, especially in rural districts, wanted an organisation held together, not by racial bonds or even cultural background — that varies in Maori population almost as much as European — but simply by the feeling, well here we are, all in the same boat, what can we do about it? (8).

She discusses the organisational structure of the League and a general history of women's organisations in New Zealand. She demonstrates the League's ability to influence social change with the example of the group being able to gain a larger allocation of State houses for Maori in Auckland city. Sturm concludes this article with two very strong statements, the first in relation to the position of Maori in New Zealand society in the fifties and the second concerning Maori women leading the drive for social change. She is explicit in identifying the different position of Maori:

socially, economically, or educationally. And I think that statements like this should be made without any attempts to 'cover up' in case someone should suspect that a 'colour bar' or 'racial discrimination' or 'anti-Pakeha feeling' is implied. Any attention paid to these terms is in direct opposition to the best welfare work ... Anything that can be done to make Maoris' half-way position between two cultures a better one (not necessarily an easier one), whether it entails accentuating the difference between Maori and Pakeha in some cases, or minimising it in others will give direction to all the ambitions and activities of the M. W. W. L. (58).

This acknowledgement of the difference in living conditions many Maori were forced to endure was written at a time, when the expectation for all Maori was in Sturm's own words "to become respectable middle-class citizens, a lighter shade of brown, as it were" (Millar and McLeod 518). Her final statement in the article is in regard to a question she was asked about Maori women leading the drive for social change for Maori and whether it means that the status of Maori women had changed. Her reply was that she did not know whether the status had changed but she suggested "that nearly all the disadvantages of the Maoris' position are felt most acutely in the home, so that it is the women, not the men, who have to cope with them daily, understand them more fully and are most strongly moved to do some thing about them" (58).

Sturm feels the positioning between two cultures strongly herself, stating many years later in an interview with Briar Woods in 1994, "In some ways I've got a leg in both cultures but I

find it more comfortable not to be on either side completely; I find it more comfortable, I was even going to say, more profitable, to stand between” (180). She continues in this interview to say that although she may belong to two cultures, “you don’t have to write about one or the other or even the interaction between the two of them, let alone the clash. So long as your being a writer is in that small space between that’s where I try and stay as a person, that’s where I’ve lived my life, in the small space between” (180). Understanding this “small space between” assisted her in articulating the difficulty and cultural ambiguity many Maori could feel as they moved from the familiarity of the rural marae to the isolation of the city as she states explicitly in an article on another group of which she was a member, the Ngati Poneke Maori club. In this article too, she demonstrates meticulous research, clarity in her thinking and writing and an empathy for the loneliness of Maori newly arrived in the city as well as the loneliness which Maori women struggling to raise their families could also experience in rural areas. She is not afraid to state her views particularly in regard to the different position in society in which many Maori found themselves. However, Sturm’s writing is never condescending nor does it become strident or didactic. Both in her writing in the fifties and in her interviews forty and fifty years later Sturm remains considered in her approach. However, in the television documentary of her life, *Broken Journey*, Sturm’s son, John Baxter, noted that her “Maoriness was a private thing” and this is evident in her interviews where she is careful to make clear that her comments relate only to herself and her writing. In further describing her writing as a Maori Sturm says:

I’d even go so far as to say it’s got nothing to do with a deep knowledge of anything specifically Maori. I used to feel guilty that I wasn’t fluent in the language. Then I felt that I’d lost almost anything I did have of it. I don’t feel like that anymore — because I know what I am inside and I know that I have got ways of looking at things, of coming at things, of feeling about things which I know are Maori. How do I know this? Because I see them in other Maori who have never written, will never write, but it’s part of their being (181).

The first short story in English by a Maori writer published in *Te Ao Hou* was Sturm’s “For All the Saints” which appeared in the December 1955 edition. Although I have discussed some

aspects of this story in an earlier chapter, its importance warrants further discussion in this chapter as it was also the first short story by a Maori writer in English to be included in a New Zealand anthology when it appeared in *New Zealand Short Stories Second Series* in 1966. Eric Schwimmer, the first editor of *Te Ao Hou* states in *Broken Journey* that “The Maori Affairs Department was very assimilationist at the time. ‘For All the Saints’ — was a godsend for it presented the difference between a world with a Pakeha centre and a world with a Maori centre.” Sturm is explicit in the first paragraph of this story that the central character, Alice, is Maori. She also makes the statement in the context of discussion of the Maori and Rarotongan staff at the hospital that “colour didn’t really make much difference unless someone started a fight, and then the important thing was not the kind of person you were, but what side you belonged to” (58). Just as Sturm sets up with this sentence that colour does matter, so she sets up too, that the Pakeha-centric world also lacks understanding of the lonely, poorly educated and the unwell. The story highlights some of the points that Sturm had made in her articles, the difficulty that women and families face away from traditional whanau and marae support networks, and the loneliness that this distance engenders, as well as the more political aspects of the usually veiled, yet sometimes explicit racism that Maori encountered in their transition from rural to urban living.

It is interesting to see the similarities between Sturm’s writing about Maori with the way Mansfield wrote of Maori. Smith in her introduction to Mansfield’s stories comments on Mansfield’s inclusion of Maori characters; “when she does include Maoris in the stories she usually avoids racial categorisation and invites the reader to perceive them first as a part of the narrative, and then realise that they are Maori” (xi). The reader can see this in “How Pearl Button was Kidnapped.” It is clear that Mansfield uses the technique that Sturm calls in her own work “obliquity” and which Sturm sees as a marker of her writing as Maori. Wevers writes “... and it is only after the reader has supplied the missing term ‘Maori’ that Sturm’s stories fall horrifyingly into place. This quality of buried shock, which has the effect of drawing attention to the reader’s own racism makes Sturm’s work very powerful ...” (“Short Stories by Maori Writers” 27). Both Sturm and Mansfield are prepared to shock, but

by their subtlety they encourage their readers to come to realisations about their own values and world views.

In the fifties and sixties there was little literary criticism of Maori writing. Chadwick Allen writes in his 1997 thesis *Blood as narrative/narrative as blood*:

New Zealand literary scholars, concerned until quite recently almost exclusively with British-derived standards of aesthetic excellence, have tended to ignore the early post-World War II period of Maori writing or to dismiss its production as insignificant in the larger history of New Zealand arts and letters ... No comprehensive study of Maori writing of this period has been attempted since Bill Pearson included a twelve page section on "Writing by Maori" in his chapter-length survey of "the Maori and Literature 1938-1965," published as part of Erik Schwimmer's symposium *The Maori People in the nineteen-sixties*. (140)

The first iteration of Pearson's study appeared as "Attitudes to the Maori in Some Pakeha Fiction" in *Journal of the Polynesian Society* in 1958. In this article he acknowledges the opinions he sought from "three Maoris" including "Miss J. C. Sturm". It is note-worthy that this acknowledgement is not repeated in the later article to which Allen refers. This could be seen as surprising considering the warm relationship Pearson had with Sturm from their time in Christchurch together, although by the time of writing his second article Pearson was well established lecturing at Auckland University. It is more surprising that Pearson, somewhat dismissively in the section "Writing by Maori", describes "For All the Saints" as a "sympathetic character study — in the European tradition — of a hospital cook" (126). This rather misses the point that the story describes the loneliness and alienation that the said cook experiences as she is forced into the city to find work in order to support her elderly aunt who remains on the farm. Pearson describes the dominant topic written about in all but five stories (and he counts "For All the Saints" as one of the five exceptions) as "adaptation to the revolution In Maori society and outlook that has occurred since the Second World War; the migration to the cities, the increase in contact with Pakehas and the



dependence for a living on the Pakeha economy ... the contrast of the 'new world' with the old rural Maori community and its relaxed and loving ways, the problem of how much of its virtues and values can be cultivated in the city, how much the migrant to the city has to jettison them" (126). It seems that Alice, the cook, is a tragic example of someone unable to make the adaptation that an intolerant Pakeha world expects of her. Rather than treating this story as an exception in the "European tradition" it would have been more useful to treat this "sympathetic character study" as what we now know it to be, a harbinger of an emerging Maori literary canon. It is a pragmatic and realistic look at Maori life as it was for many, not only with difficulties in adjusting to an urban existence, but also difficulties that existed in the life that had been left behind. Sturm, in *Broken Journey*, says that the expectations put on early Maori writing meant that "Maoris wrote about Maoris, ok, well not actually about Maoris, but as the Pakeha saw us, about a Kuia, or granny, taking the mokopuna, grandchildren down to the rocks to collect kai moana." Sturm continued railing, albeit in her quiet manner, against those expectations saying "But I'm talking about an author or an artist, whatever, they should be allowed to do what they want to do ... what their emotional memory tells them to do and they should be allowed to do it with all the passion in the world, never mind about their ethnicity, never mind about their gender — just let them do it and if you can't understand it then work at it until you can."

Sturm's work was published in *Te Ao Hou* during the fifties, but nothing was published after a review of a book on Maori marriage customs by Bruce Biggs in 1961. Eric Schwimmer left the editorial role in 1961 and was succeeded by Margaret Orbell from 1962 until 1966. Allen notes that during her editorship "*Te Ao Hou* published an increased number of bi-lingual texts and its short fiction more openly engaged in oppositional politics. It is unclear to what degree, if any, Orbell's presence as editor affected the content of *Te Ao Hou's* fiction" ("Blood as Narrative" 111). It is also not clear whether the editorial change was the reason that Sturm no longer had work published in the magazine. Orbell published an anthology of Maori writing, *Contemporary Maori Writing* in 1970, a collection of twenty-seven short stories, most of which had appeared in *Te Ao Hou*. Sturm did not have any work in this

anthology, and in fact only four stories published during Schwimmer's editorship were included. In her introduction Orbell writes:

The authors of the stories and poems in this collection have much in common in their experience of life and in their writing. It is this shared experience and similarity of approach to their subject matter, rather than the fact of their being Maori, which justifies bringing their work together in a separate collection. They are the first generation of Maori writers to make much use of literary forms that are European in origin ... A constant theme is the closeness and warmth of community life and the support that the social group has given the individual (7).

The statement that contains the words "the first generation of Maori writers" sounds as though all those writing at the time have been included, except that Sturm, the first of all Maori writers to be published in a New Zealand anthology, and the first writer to have a short story in *Te Ao Hou* is excluded. In 1978 Orbell published an article in *World Literature Written in English* entitled "Maori Women's Writing: an Introductory Survey". She writes a brief history of Maori including her view on the place of women writers in Maori society: "Until very recently, however, modified versions of traditional attitudes persisted strongly in certain areas of Maori life, and they defined the role of women in such a way that there was no place for women writers" (252). As Orbell, earlier in the article, defines the period of Maori history she is describing as spanning the last 150 years, one would assume she is describing "very recently" as the last few years, not the twenty-five years that have past since Maori women have been published generally as well as in *Te Ao Hou*. Orbell continues "Since they [Maori writers] wished to communicate with a Maori audience and felt more at home in a Maori context, most of them wrote for *Te Ao Hou*" (253). Orbell does acknowledge one of Sturm's stories as having "gained the recognition of being included in the Oxford University Press anthology entitled *New Zealand Short Stories: Second Series*" (253). She includes this story among those written in the sixties and makes no further comment on it. Such generalisations in an international literary journal may give a

misleading view New Zealand's literary history, particularly that which relates to Maori writing<sup>5</sup>.

One can only speculate as to the reasons for Sturm's absence from the later pages of *Te Ao Hou* and this anthology. It may have been, as Sturm herself intimated, that her writing, from her own "emotional memory" did not obviously fit with what Orbell, and others, as Pakeha editors deemed accurate or appropriate examples of Maori life and experience. Sturm said further in *Broken Journey* that "Maoris wrote about Maoris, but Maoris as Pakeha saw us." She reflected that the editors in trying to tell people what they should write, "more or less turned their backs on me". John Baxter, her son, in talking of this period of Sturm's writing in the same documentary said "I think she was ignored quite a bit and she also got knocked back to the point where she stopped submitting stuff, and that was sad".

Even when writing directly about Maori Sturm was unable to find an audience. This may have been because her story, "First Native and Pink Pig" was explicitly about racism, a topic that was not directly dealt with in the fifties. Sturm, however, did not shy from such topics, as she explained in her article on the Maori Women's Welfare League, that writing on or about Maori should reflect the reality of life without being concerned that any perceptions of 'anti-Pakeha feeling' may be implied. "First Native and Pink Pig" engages, as Wevers describes in "The History of the Short Story in New Zealand", "directly with cultural oppositions" (127). In this story the cultural oppositions are those experienced by nine-year-old George in the school playground, but then extend to further cultural misunderstandings. George first experiences racist taunts after he and another young Maori boy are cast as first and second natives in a school play. It appears that the play was a genuine effort to describe early life in New Zealand, but the reader sees that identifying the Maori characters in the

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<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that one of the Associate Editors of *World Literature Written in English* was Peter Alcock, later to become Sturm's second husband and author in this journal of a companion piece, "The Writing of Women in New Zealand".

play only by their race and a number diminishes them and makes them less than human. This becomes the catalyst for the racism that does not appear to have been explicit previously, although we do learn that Michael, a Pakeha boy at the school, has been brought up to believe that Maori are inferior and it seems that the play has provided him with an opportunity to find a receptive audience for his views. George only discloses this bullying to his mother when he is deciding whom to invite to his birthday party, and he feels that inviting Michael to his party will give him the opportunity to see that they are “not dirty or got something the matter with us” (90). George’s mother is surprised not only with George’s disclosure, and “taken unawares with a mind like a cheap department store” but also that she had missed it was happening, “she wondered with a sudden sense of having failed somewhere, how long had it been going on without her having noticed that something was wrong, and why hadn’t George told her?” (90). She comes to the realisation that not only is her son being bullied because of his race, but that he is also keeping things from her. This story, now, is also a ‘coming of age’ story like those of Davin and Sargeson, although George’s growing up is being forced upon him, not only because he realises that there is nothing he can do to prevent prejudice, but that he also must protect his mother from his pain. At his birthday party George sees that his mother is powerless to change Michael’s behaviour. She does not disagree with Michael when he asks her to support his view that early American settlers won land from the Indians by slaughtering them. She does not challenge Michael’s bullying behaviour when he has a drink accidentally spilt on him. As Michael’s behaviour gets worse she does silence him with a combination of Maori and French, “whakarongo mai, fermez la bouche”, which demonstrates not only the boy’s ignorance, but also her own lack of facility with the Maori language (95). However, Michael unwittingly echoes her command when he, apparently impressed, breathes “Gee — listen to that” (95). To defuse the tension, and to please her son, she gets the boys to play Simon Says. In choosing to play this game which requires the winner to be the very best at imitation and obedience, Sturm has created a situation where, to win, Michael has to be subservient to the mother, the Pakeha subservient to the Maori. Sturm uses this game as the title of a poem “Simon Says” published in *Dedications* many years later, where there is no inversion, for in the poem Maori are expected to blindly follow the Pakeha direction.

“Whakarongo mai” is also used in the poem as Maori refuse to accept Pakeha direction. The cry of “listen to me” is in two very different contexts, but both are equally painful.

As the boys leave Michael breaks George’s new plane, and is upset as he realises he will not be asked back, and that despite what his mother had said it was a good party. Unable to express this in the face of George’s anger, Michael tells George to tell his mother “she is a dirty stinking cow of a Maori, and see what she can do about it” (97). George is now aware that his mother is powerless to stop the racist taunts and realises that all he can do is protect her from his pain. This story shows the powerlessness of the mother. She does not know how to challenge the racism she experiences in her own home because her behaviour to one of the boys at school can impact adversely on her son, and in effect resorting to the name calling, that Michael is just a pig, does not help George at all. George learns the art of dissemblance, and that he now must cry alone in his room. In common with most of Sturm’s family stories, the father is absent, not only absent from the party, but also from the planning for the party and from being able to offer advice to his wife or solace for his son’s pain. Mrs Harrison has no whanau support, no marae to return to for support, just a son who now does not share his pain.

Sturm stated in an interview with Roma Potiki in 2006 that this is the only story in which she is explicit about racism. She said “There’s one of my stories in *The House of the Talking Cat* called ‘First Native and Pink Pig’. If you want to know how I feel about racial relations in New Zealand then you’ve got it there. I don’t need to go on and write a whole book about the stuff” (7). This story was not accepted for publication when first written in the fifties but was published in *Into the World of Light* an anthology of Maori writing edited by Ihimaera and Long in 1982. Twenty-five years later, reflecting in *Broken Journey* on the publication of *Into the World of Light*, Ihimaera himself appears to have misremembered the events surrounding the inclusion of Sturm’s stories as he describes speaking to her in 1982 asking to read her stories. However, in Ihimaera’s literary papers held in the Victoria University

library are two letters from Sturm to him regarding this matter. The first of these is dated 18 March 1975 in which Sturm says she will post the manuscripts of her short stories the next day to the English Department in Dunedin. She does ask for them to be returned to her as she “is not likely to have time to type another”. In her second letter dated 6 May 1975 expressing her emotional response to Ihimaera’s compliments, Sturm writes, “I felt humble and proud, glad and sad, hopeful and hopeless a real confusion of feelings — too much for my rusty pen — then as now”. Perhaps the seven-year difference can be seen as of little consequence in the greater history of the Maori literary canon, but as Ihimaera and Wood began work on this anthology in 1973, it becomes obvious that an approach to Sturm being much earlier than Ihimaera’s later recollection does give Sturm’s writing a greater acknowledgement than if her work had been included as an afterthought moments before publication.

Taken individually, the “forgetting” by Pearson and Orbell, and the misremembering by Ihimaera may not have made a great deal of difference to the development of a Maori literary history, however, collectively it is possible to argue that these may have contributed to Sturm having lost her rightful place at the very beginning of the development of Maori writing in English.

## Chapter 5: “The Long Forgetting”

Having attempted a deconstruction of Sturm’s early writing by presenting three possible readings of her works it is obvious that such demarcations and divisions show as many overlaps and merging amongst them as there are areas of separateness. Sturm’s writings are much more than the three separate readings, Social Informer, Woman and Maori; they are multi-layered pieces of writing which as a whole construction offer much more than the three deconstructions which I have used to demonstrate Sturm’s place in the New Zealand literary canon of the fifties. In this chapter I will explore that place more fully as well as exploring further the natures of Sturm’s silence in order to bring some remembering into the long forgetting of Sturm’s early work. My chapter heading, “The Long Forgetting” comes from Patrick Evans and his study of New Zealand’s post-colonial literary culture, *The Long Forgetting* (2007). That study in its own way, deals with the issues of forgetting, remembering and misremembering which I have briefly discussed in Sturm’s work and which I will further discuss here.

Bringing the three readings together allows me to identify the themes and commonalities in all of Sturm’s work and to demonstrate her place in the literary canon, not only as a Maori writer, or a woman writer, but as a Writer. As I have already said, Sturm herself rejected categorisation, instead choosing to write what her “emotional memory tells” her (*Broken Journey*). In her early writing I see that her “emotional memory” brings all three aspects of her writing together most evocatively in “Where to, Lady?”, where the complexities of race, gender and class are explored in a mere eight pages. Sturm finds many “small spaces between”, between Maori and Pakeha, between child-encumbered housewife and vivacious, literate young woman and between middle-class and working class, ensuring that the reader discovers that for a woman, regardless of race or class, the only space she really belongs is “home” whether or not it offers comfort, warmth or safety. For a woman, home becomes a small place, or a small space as women by virtue of being married lose their bigger place in

society. Wevers writes “ ‘Home’ in short fiction by women is represented as the place in which the female self-hood is most clearly recognised and where it is most at risk ... ‘home’ is a continuous reinvention of place and condition” (“History of the Short Story” 188). For Sturm, however, her “small space” meant that she has some difficulty in the literary world in which she struggled to gain recognition. Sturm was writing at the margins, and although by this century margins have become “sites of possibilities that are exciting and on the edge” (Smith 213), in the fifties and into the sixties there was often no place for such writing on the “edge” to be published.

In her thesis exploring New Zealand character Sturm identifies some common themes in the work of Sargeson, Davin and Mulgan, including relationships, both male/male and female/male, family and marginalisation from society. As I have described these became themes in Sturm’s own writing and are seen throughout all her writing genres and whether she is read as social informer, Maori or woman writer. Sturm said that her themes could be seen as “tolerance, acceptance and loving one another” (Interview with Potiki 5), and her writing, whether its focus is race, gender or class, reflects this.

In exploring Sturm’s works and the social and literary context in which she was writing, it has become obvious that there were two silences which were operating in regards to her writing; the active silence imposed by Sturm’s personal situation of needing to earn a living in order to keep not only herself, but also to raise her granddaughter; and the passive silence imposed upon her by the New Zealand literary world. Sturm was silent, but she had also been silenced. Mark Williams writes that “Critics *actively* participate in the making of literature and of culture generally ... they keep alive a sense of the past showing its continued force in the present” (“Introduction” 11). This participation remains active even when the critic is silent about a work, for the decision of whether or not to acknowledge the work by commenting on it can be just as powerful as the commentary that may be made on one of the “chosen” pieces of writing. If part of that past is forgotten, or incorrectly



remembered, then the force which it may have on the present is lost, or incorrectly attributed. Thus, although *Numbers*, and *Te Ao Hou* received comment as journals themselves at the time (and subsequently), Sturm's work received little, if any, attention apart from the "fuss about *Numbers*" detailed earlier in this thesis. Williams continues "[I]n the 1950s and well into the 1960s masculine realism and cultural nationalism were still largely unchallenged features of the official literary culture" (13). It is apparent that as Sturm's writing was challenging to both the masculine realism and the monocultural nationalism that remained favoured by writers, editors and critics, she was unable to be published in the broader forums which would have firmly established her place as writer.

The place which Sturm's writing should have held was acknowledged by Janet Frame. While Sturm was living back in Dunedin with her family she had become reacquainted with Frame whom she had known from her days at Otago University and the two became lifelong friends. It was later that year, 1966, that the two of them would have stories published in *New Zealand Short Stories*. Frame admired Sturm and wrote of her "when Jacquie speaks it's as if the whole world is hushed" (King, *Wrestling with the Angel* 302). Sturm gave her collection of stories to Frame to read and Frame wrote of them "I feel that if they are not published, there is something missing from our "literary scene" ... she's a fine skilled sensitive writer, full of gifts" (332). Rather than the world being 'hushed', the world had 'hushed' Sturm and something did become missing from the literary scene.

In order to understand both the silence and the being silenced some further discussion is warranted on writing silence. Joanna Russ, on the cover of her book *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, listed a number of comments which have been made in the context of women's writing. Several of these apply to Sturm; "She didn't write it, ... but if she did she had help", such comments were made to Sturm by an editor, intimating that her husband, Baxter, must have helped her (cited in Millar, "Jacquie Baxter/J. C. Sturm" 96); "She wrote it, but look at what she wrote about ... the bedroom, the kitchen ...", certainly the comments

after the publication of “For the Novelty” as reflected in the newspapers of the day; “She wrote it BUT ...” could apply to the reaction, or lack of action from critics and editors to her Maori writing, or perhaps “She wrote it but she shouldn’t have” as Sturm’s writing did not fit with the perceptions that Pakeha editors had as to what Maori writing should be. It is difficult in the twenty-first century to always remember the publishing strictures of the fifties or even the eighties when Russ was writing, however, there can be no doubt that the problems Russ describes were very present when Sturm was writing in New Zealand. Williams writes “when we look back on the critical writing of the previous period we often find that, for all that individual critics see themselves as removed from the follies of their own time, collectively they display common blindness and limitations” (12). However, in noting the “blindness” that I have described in relation to the lack of response and acknowledgement of Sturm’s writing, I also take on board his warning that if I deconstruct “too cavalierly the authoritative voices of the past” I may demonstrate the limitations in my own argument. Thus although noting that there has been some forgetting of Sturm’s work by her contemporaries, Pearson and Orbell, I also recognise the value of their voices in the recognition of Maori writing in general.

An obituary for Tillie Olsen cites Margaret Atwood’s review of *Silences* in which she saw that Olsen’s small writing output could be attributed to the “gruelling obstacle course” which a working mother has to endure, describing *Silences* as beginning “with an account ... of her own long, circumstantially enforced silence. She did not write for a very simple reason: A day has 24 hours. For 20 years she had no time, no energy and none of the money that would have bought both” (Bosman). Olsen’s writing silence covers almost the same period of time as Sturm’s and the reasons were the same as fifties New Zealand was at times very close to fifties America. However, Sturm’s personal writing silence was prefaced by silencing at the hands of various editors and publishers. Sturm was silent and silenced.

It is useful to reflect on the response to these stories when they were published as *House of the Talking Cat* some twenty to twenty-five years after they were written. Gadd, in *Landfall*, and Ihimaera and Duckworth in *New Zealand Listener*, wrote reviews in 1983 and 1984, and Jones in *Barbed Wire and Mirrors* commented on the collection of short stories. Jones succinctly summed up the reasons that these stories “remained buried there” as being due to “several factors relating to the situation of women at the time: marriage and the assumption of domestic responsibilities and the reluctance of New Zealand publishers to consider work by women” (215). He notes that if these stories “had been published as a collection when they should have been, they would have preceded *Pounamu Pounamu* as a Maori first, and as a collection of stories Sturm’s book is at least as strong as that volume” (216). This view is reflected by Ihimaera himself in his 1983 review. Duckworth and Ihimaera have their reviews placed consecutively in the same issue of *New Zealand Listener* and are very different in both approach and appreciation. Ihimaera in describing Sturm’s role in the Maori literary movement notes that she “has been an enigmatic presence among us all” (91). He describes her as “an accomplished and fine writer”, and continues “[W]hat is equally apparent is that Sturm is, from a Maori point of view, a pivotal presence in the Maori literary tradition ... In many ways they are also much stronger than the pieces written in the 1970s, and modern Maori writers would be surprised at the forcefulness behind the words” (92). Duckworth, however, writes that the stories were written in “a period when women looked for sympathy and understanding for their problems, but not so far as a way out. Consequently it is the negative aspects of life which are celebrated here, rather than the positive” (92). I find it difficult to understand that ‘negative aspects’ can be described as being ‘celebrated’, and even more so when Sturm is writing of domestic abuse (which by the eighties was well-documented and acknowledged as a social concern), alcoholism and racial discrimination. It could be seen that Duckworth may be minimising these issues by naming them “suburban neurosis” and the “communication” gap. Rather than the “forcefulness” which Ihimaera describes, Duckworth finds the “quiet messages and unobtrusive style ... just a little too quiet” (92). Duckworth does consider that Sturm captures the New Zealand landscape “recognisably”, however, the example she chooses of a meeting at the “Cenotaph” does not happen; in none of the stories is there such a “meeting” and the only

mention of the “Cenotaph” is in “Where to, Lady?”, a story where the description of the city could as easily be Dunedin as Wellington. Duckworth and Ihimaera also differ in their approach to Sturm’s writing silence; Ihimaera writes that he has broached this with Sturm who was adamant that “*Cat* must be published first” and he has a lingering, if regretful, admiration for her “stubbornness and doggedness” (92); Duckworth acknowledges that “the volume does make good reading and should have been collected sooner” (92), obviously forgetting that it had been ‘collected’ much earlier, but was rejected by publishers. Somewhat cruelly, particularly in the light that Duckworth herself had a fifteen-year writing silence, Duckworth concludes her review with “[C]an we expect some *new* stories from this writer?” (92) This comment reminds us of the Russ comment, “She wrote it but she only wrote one of it” (cover), perhaps even leading us to develop a new truism “She wrote it BUT it’s old”.

Gadd also comments on “the air of datedness” of *House of the Talking Cat*, commenting on the “obsolescence of the traditional middle class values at the core of the stories” (357). He describes what he sees as a contrast in the ways in which Sturm involves her Maori characters, writing that the “author insists upon the Maoriness of some characters, introducing them with a crudeness that most certainly captures that of the pakeha middle classes of a few decades ago ... yet other Maori characters can only be deduced as such from enigmatic details” (359). Gadd acknowledges Sturm as “being accepted as one of the first Maori writers of fiction that the literary nabobs who controlled publishing would admit to print” (359)<sup>6</sup>. Gadd finishes his review with the comment “[t]he price J. C. Sturm had to pay to be published — and the price most Maori writers still have to pay — is to pander to the middle class pakeha sensibilities and ethnocentrism”(359). I do not need to reiterate at

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<sup>6</sup> Gadd appears to forget that Sturm’s initial publishers were those of *Numbers* with a very small print run and *Te Ao Hou* with a very restricted readership (and in fact she was “persistently and firmly rejected” by *Landfall* in which his review is published. It may be that he was referring to Sturm’s inclusion *New Zealand Short Stories* 2 published in 1966, but that one story, in that one anthology would hardly warrant the use of term ‘nabobs’.

length my view that it was that she did not pander to these sensibilities that meant she was unable to find publishers for her stories in the fifties and sixties.

The “datedness” comments by Gadd and Duckworth are worth some further elaboration. Any piece of writing we may read out of its time will always have an air of “otherness”, however, that does not diminish the piece, rather our reading experience may be heightened with the extra dimension a different age presents to us as readers. Certainly with works by Shakespeare, the Brontes and Dickens “datedness” or presentation of another era has not diminished their current day readership. The importance of “datedness” or past writing, in understanding the history, particularly of women’s, writing is explained by Showalter: “Before we can even ask how the literature of women would be different and special, we need to reconstruct its past, to rediscover the scores of women novelists, poets and dramatists whose work has been obscured by time, and to establish the continuity of the female tradition from decade to decade” (137). Sturm herself seemed to be undeterred by the criticism of Gadd and Duckworth as she had the last unpublished of her stories written in the fifties and sixties not only included in, but becoming the title of her final collection of stories and poems, *The Glass House*, which was published in 2006. Sturm is clear that her “overall theme of the book which was one of tolerance and acceptance” (Interview with Potiki 5), is a theme which does not date but is, as this story shows, timeless.

It is clear that Sturm, as any writer does, experienced mixed reactions to her stories, and to be fair to her critics, these stories were reflective of the period in which they were written, rather than the period in which they were published. However, both Jones and Ihimaera were clear about the importance of the collection and that place that Sturm’s stories should have in the literary history of New Zealand, with Jones writing “this volume ... is valuable if belated evidence of where it [the short story] has been” (*Barbed Wire* 216).

Remembering correctly how things were and where things have been is crucial if we are to have clear understandings, not only of our past, but also of our present. I briefly touched on forgetting and misremembering in Chapter 4 by mentioning the forgettings by Pearson and Orbell and the misremembering of dates by Ihimaera. *The Long Forgetting*, the book whose title I have appropriated for this chapter heading is Patrick Evans', as the cover avers, study of "post-colonial literary culture in New Zealand". Evans whilst, discussing forgettings, rememberings and amnesias himself, also provides me with some examples which could be seen as misrememberings relating to Sturm. Evans' discussions of revisionist histories from the eighties appears to lead to a forgetting of his own; his desire for a 'postcolonial moment' leads him to misremember the much longer, more gradual journeys that New Zealand politics, Maori history, women's movements and literature have taken to arrive in the present twenty-first century. By romanticising the protests which occurred during the 1981 Springboks rugby tour to New Zealand, and postulating that they became the 'postcolonial moment', albeit with a question mark, Evans has forgotten the histories and events which led to the tour even becoming an issue, let alone a 'moment'. The history that brought New Zealand to that point is forgotten; CARE (Citizens Association for Racial Equality) began in 1964, HART (Halt All Racist Tours) some five years later; Kirk cancelled the 1973 Springboks tour to New Zealand and in 1976 there were loud and well-attended protests against South Africa at the world softball tournament held in Lower Hutt. To create a moment some seventeen years after the anti-apartheid feeling became well-developed in New Zealand is more than a little re-constructionist. In attempting to identify a "turning point" Evans seems to use the same filtering process in critiquing the dominant culture as he accuses the dominant culture of adopting, "[I]t accepts forgetting not just as an inevitable part of colonisation but as necessary to it ..." (41).

Similarly by allowing to sit out of context a comment from Baxter that the commune on the Whanganui River was a way for "pakeha to learn the Maori side of things" (45), he has forgotten that Baxter's wife (Sturm) and children were Maori and his children were brought up knowing "the Maori side of things", and that Baxter's journey to the Whanganui certainly

had its genesis from within his own family, a journey which continued through his work in School Publications as he searched for stories that Maori children could relate to; this remembering could perhaps have weakened Evans' argument about Pakeha attempting to "become Maori" or would perhaps have meant omitting Baxter from it.

By choosing to mark the end of "masculinist" period with the abduction of Mervyn Thompson in 1984, Evans has, rather than acknowledge development of Maori writing and the growing women's movement along with the developing body of women's writing, kept his focus on the 'strong' male tradition, allowing, in his chapter "Remembering", Maori writing to be relegated to "Agonising" (151) and women's writing to "The female sublime" (155). Evans writes in his introduction "we have to construct our own understanding from what we are given" (12), but it is in this construction of "our own understanding" that our enthusiasm can lead us to forgetting and misremembering, and by attempting to construct "moments" of beginning for postcolonial culture, for Maori renaissance or for the women's movement, we can lose the forerunners, the "pivotal presence" of those who attempted the journeys early. One of those missed by Evans is Sturm whom he may even include in his "Lost Matrix of women writers" (158), or he may consider in the same light as Mary Stanley of whom he wrote "... fell silent, was retrieved in the feminist sweep for lost women in the 1980s" (158). Such choosing and selections are inevitable in any literary review which covers both the depth of analysis and the broad sweep of time that Evans' does. However, each time that forgettings or misrememberings happen, the accurate dates, timings or more accurate versions become lost and thus large parts of histories are rewritten and past voices are silenced.

Until this point I have chosen not to comment on the impact that Sturm's husband, James K. Baxter, had not only on her writing, but also on her life. However, there can be no doubt that Baxter played a very large role in Sturm's writing and in her writing silence, but, that is

not to say that he deliberately set out to silence her. Sturm acknowledges that Baxter did not attempt to influence her writing, he made no comment when she showed him things she had written which meant, she said, “he left me completely free to do my own thing” (Potiki 3). However, Holman wrote that “[h]er literary ambitions were not exactly encouraged by Baxter: his sudden and precocious appearance in New Zealand’s literary firmament in the 1940s would overshadow much of her adult life” (1). Nonetheless, Sturm was able to complete her Master’s thesis in their early married years, whilst raising two small children and dealing with Baxter’s drinking, demonstrating a tenacity and ability that has not often been acknowledged. However, once Baxter had left for Jerusalem and Auckland Sturm was unable to write, finding that her need to earn a living and raise her granddaughter occupied all her time and energy. In addition Sturm still provided emotional support to Baxter. Frame wrote in 1970 “... Though his heart is wrapped up in his Jerusalem project even he seems to need to have one foot, if not in materialism, then in the home comforts of shelter, privacy, warmth, light; and to need the strength of his wife’s presence” (King 360). McKay wrote that “[L]ate September (1971) Baxter returned to his family in Ngaio. He soon realised how easy it would be to settle down again at home. Love of family seemed to make it the obvious thing to do ...” (271). The love they felt for each other cannot be doubted, despite the difficulties that each encountered in their relationship, however, it could be possible that it became an emotional burden which may also have contributed to her writing silence, for as Sturm writes:

What is still untold will remain

Untold, and ours ...

None will ever know where

Those years of exploration

And discovery took us

And what we found there ... (“P.S. 22.10.9” 7-8, 12-15).



Not only could Baxter's writing achievements overshadow Sturm, but also the mere fact that, because of the social mores of the fifties, Sturm adopted Baxter's surname, so could his name cause an overshadowing. How a person is remembered may determine what they are remembered for. In Sturm's case this may extend to the probability that the name that you are remembered by can determine what you are remembered for. Sturm distinguished her private life, as a mother and wife of Baxter, from her writing life by clearly differentiating the names she used for each; Jacquie Baxter and J. C. Sturm. This differentiation can be seen clearly in her obituary written by Millar where he includes both names: "Jacquie Baxter / J. C. Sturm" and not quite so clearly in an interview with Rabbitt which he entitles "Jim, Jacqui and Baxter", although clarifying this somewhat by subtitling it "Jacqui the woman talks of Jim the man, Baxter the poet — and J C Sturm the poet<sup>7</sup>." The line between the personal and the writing persona becomes blurred in the indices of many books which include references to both Baxter and Sturm. For example King includes both surnames, Baxter and Sturm, but under Sturm, Jacqueline the reader is referred to "Baxter, Jacqueline (nee Sturm)" (581). She is treated in a similar fashion by Millar in *No Fretful Sleeper: a life of Bill Pearson* with all comments about Sturm, be they in a personal or her writing context, appearing under her personal name of Baxter, Jacqueline (379). Frank McKay in his biography of Baxter has listed her under both names, but any comments he makes relating to Sturm after the date of her marriage he makes reference to under her married name. In losing the distinction of Baxter, the wife and mother, and Sturm, the writer, the importance of the writing life of Sturm and the contribution she made to the New Zealand literary canon of the fifties and sixties becomes more and more lost in the shadow of Baxter.

At the beginning of this research I had hoped to be able to postulate a "What if?" — if Sturm had been published throughout the sixties, seventies and the eighties, what would the New Zealand literary canon have looked like? I have now come to the conclusion that this was a

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<sup>7</sup> Although by restricting the J. C. Sturm to "poet" Rabbitt is creating another forgetting of his own, a forgetting of her short stories, and all her early writings.

naive if well-intentioned expectation. It is impossible to predict how Sturm's writing would have developed; would what she writes be described, as Duckworth's is in her entry to *New Zealand Companion to Literature* "instantly accessible almost as a generic type" (148) or would her work be described as Patricia Grace's is in her entry in the same volume: "expressive of Maori consciousness ... distinguished also for ... its resourceful versatility of style and narrative description and technique" (215), or would "we have missed out" as Ihimaera postulates? It is impossible to say. In 1983 Ihimaera writes he is "teased by the question of whether or not the substance and style of Maori written literary tradition would have been different had J. C. Sturm been our 'first Maori to have a collection published'. *Cat* could have been published in 1965. Instead we had to wait until a certain book called *Pounamu*, *Pounamu* charted a different, and possibly more dubious, course for our written tradition by dealing with the emotional, rather than real, landscapes of the iwi Maori" (92). However, we must remain "teased by the question", for as Sturm writes in "Spring Song" "We can never / Rewrite our private histories" (19-20). The "What if?" question cannot be answered. We cannot predict what would have happened had she not been silent. What we do know, however, is that when Sturm broke her writing silence with first her poetry and then her short stories from 1990 on she has achieved an unchallenged place in the New Zealand literary canon of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries with her first book of poetry, *Dedications*, winning the Montana Poetry Honour Award in 1997. This place is earned not only for her Maori writing in English, but also her writing about relationships, aging, pain and hope. What happens in periods of silence cannot be known or guessed at; it may be that for Sturm the time of silence was a time of quiet fallowness, bringing, when the silence was over, a time of greater fertility and growth than would have happened without that rest period.

Nonetheless, at the same time of possibly bringing further growth and maturity to Sturm's writing the silence did bring with it a forgetting of what she had already achieved in the fifties and sixties. Therefore I have had to change my hoped-for outcome of this thesis to a more realistic one of bringing attention to Sturm's early writing and showing that her

achievements within this post-war period deserve to be as equally honoured and remembered as her later writing in the New Zealand literary canon, and that perhaps for Sturm the “long forgetting” of her early work may begin to be over. Sturm herself said in the interview with Wood “It’s a funny thing writing, in the end it has to be visible, but there’s an awful lot of it which is invisible” (177). Much of what she did write may remain invisible, but perhaps her early writing is now a little more visible.

I want to conclude with a short excerpt from “Where to, Lady?” with the hope that we can also now look to see where she was from as well:

And all the pain and passion, discoveries and loss, waiting and disappointments, the unending unanswerable questions, and the unwanted final statement, crept from between the covers and nestled in my hand. (27)

... and poignantly ... that “final unwanted statement” from the “Doll’s House” ... “Then both were silent once more” (350).

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