

All the juicy pastures:
Greville Texidor, Frank Sargeson and New
Zealand literary culture in the 1940s

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ABSTRACT

The cultural nationalist narrative, and the myths of origin and invention associated with it, cast a long shadow over the mid-twentieth century literary landscape. But since at least the 1980s, scholars have turned their attention to what was happening at the margins of that dominant narrative, revealing untold stories and evidence of unexpected literary meeting points, disruptions and contradictions. The nationalist frame has thus lost purchase as the only way to understand the era's literature. The 1940s in particular have emerged as a time of cultural recalibration in which subtle shifts were being nourished by various sources, not least the émigré and exilic artists who came to New Zealand from war-torn Europe. They included not only refugees but also a group of less classifiable wanderers and nomads. Among them was Greville Texidor, the peripatetic Englishwoman who transformed herself into a writer and produced a small body of fiction here, including what Frank Sargeson would call "one of the most beautiful prose works ever achieved in this country" ("Greville Texidor" 135). The Sargeson-Texidor encounter, and the larger exilic-nationalist meeting it signifies, is the focus of this thesis.

By the early 1940s, Sargeson was the acknowledged master of the New Zealand short story, feted for his 'authentic' vision of local reality and for the vernacular idiom and economical form he had developed to render it. Yet he was at a turning point, increasingly constricted by the very tradition he had created. This thesis proposes that, in Texidor, he found the ideal reader for the writer he wished to become. More than merely a mentor-protégée relationship, this was an exchange that left its imprint on Sargeson's work as much as Texidor's.

Moreover, their meeting enacted the moment at which international influences and modernist modes of expression collided with the literary nationalist project – refashioning, complicating and enlarging it in the process.

Combining literary analysis, cultural and literary history, and biography, this thesis is divided into three parts. The first examines the narrative of invention and indigeneity constructed around the dominant *Phoenix*-Caxton writers, and the scholarship challenging that narrative and its totalising claims. Turning to the arrival of exilic artists from Europe and elsewhere, it argues that the nationalist and the exilic operated as unexpectedly compatible mentalities in

1940s New Zealand. The second part considers the sources of Sargeson's literary dilemma in the 1940s, his quest for artistic reinvention, and his problematic role as mentor to a generation of emerging writers. The final part comprises a close reading of Texidor's published fiction and also (for the first time) her unpublished work. Her fiction is read not only as a record of a writer's development, but also through the lens of intermodernist theory, suggesting an affinity with writers elsewhere using modernist methods to register the personal and social consequences of political commitment and war.

This thesis is informed by extensive archival research, the author's interviews with Texidor's two daughters, and visits to significant locations in Spain. In the absence of any other significant literary or biographical accounts of Texidor, it seeks to reassess an author whose place in the New Zealand literary canon has been contested and whose influence on her contemporaries is little recognised.

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INTRODUCTION

One evening in 1943, Allen Curnow was experiencing an important cultural moment. At the sky-blue, light-filled Wellington house designed by modernist Austrian architect Ernst Plischke for his fellow-refugees Joachim and Gertrud Kahn, Curnow and others were listening to a recording of a Beethoven quartet.

Over the preceding decade, Curnow's poetry had mounted a sustained assault on the limitations and insecurities of what he called these "stone-deaf islands".¹ Along with the ardent young founders of *Phoenix, Tomorrow* and the Caxton Press, he had proclaimed the New Zealand artist's prophetic role: to articulate the unrealised meaning of an unformed and spiritually arid land, using an idiom that was authentically of this place and nowhere else.

This was the essential tenet of what has come to be known as the cultural nationalist project, whose literature Curnow and his contemporaries created, published and championed throughout the 1930s and '40s, and beyond. Distancing themselves from their forebears' nostalgic loyalty to Empire and Home, they turned their attention from copses and drawing-rooms to the hard-edged, barely-settled landscape around them. There, they saw taciturn men struggling against the land, against their own inarticulacy and a repressive, spiritually dead community. Even after one hundred years, the European seemed homeless in an environment at once hostile, debased and indifferent. Māori, if they were visible at all, were the shadowy remnants of a more admirable past that the colonial project had extinguished. The only chance of redemption, at least for the European, lay in accepting "the condition of being a New Zealander" and attending to the "local and special" (Curnow, *BNZV* 1951 48; *PBNZV* 1960 17). This was the vision the nationalists sought to realise in their poetry and prose. Their project's aim – repeatedly and often dogmatically asserted – was to create a genuinely indigenous literature that unsettled more than it consoled, but in which they and New Zealand readers would finally find "a home in thought" (Cook 2).

But now at the Kahn house, listening to Beethoven, Curnow heard something else – intimations of the larger world to which he was also connected, the possibility of crossing "motionless horizons as if not marooned", of finding a more sophisticated, expansive and *international* cultural space within which a New Zealand artist might construct a home.

¹ "At Joachim Kahn's" (*Collected Poems* 128). Unless otherwise stated, all Curnow quotations in this introduction are from this poem.

Curnow's poem "At Joachim Kahn's" registers this moment and its transformative possibilities. John Newton drew attention to it in a 2010 essay, calling the coming-together of European exiles and New Zealand's literary nationalists "the most pressing untold story of the cultural nationalist era" ("Allen Curnow" 28). Elsewhere, Newton describes the encounter as the catalyst for "a new cultural tuning" that calls into question the well-worn legend of New Zealand literature's "invention" by the brave young men of the 1930s and '40s ("Surviving" 94). If such an invention did indeed occur, he suggests, it was considerably "more complex than our favourite historical narratives imagine: more transnational, more dialectical and – crucially – more in the debt of non-Anglophone cultures" ("Allen Curnow" 28).

Newton is not alone in questioning the assumed dominance of literary nationalism, and in considering what else might have been happening at the margins of that favoured narrative. His is but one contribution to a body of scholarship that has revealed other untold stories and adduced evidence of unexpected meeting points, antecedents, contradictions and impurities that complicate our understanding of the mid-century literary landscape. As a result of such reconsiderations, described more fully in 1.4 below, the literary nationalist frame has lost purchase as the only way to understand the literature of the era.

The 1940s in particular have emerged as a time of cultural adjustment in New Zealand literature, a period in which subtle shifts were being nourished by a range of sources – not least the émigré and exilic artists who had been arriving from war-torn Europe since the late 1930s. They included not just refugees from continental Europe, but also a group of less classifiable wanderers and nomads. Among them was Greville Texidor, the peripatetic Englishwoman who transformed herself into a writer in New Zealand and produced what Frank Sargeson would call "one of the most beautiful prose works ever achieved in this country" ("Greville Texidor" 135).

This thesis seeks to shed light on Texidor's largely neglected achievement, and on her literary relationship with Sargeson throughout the 1940s. Like Curnow's evening at the Kahn house, this was another significant and decidedly reciprocal encounter between the cultural nationalist project and the forces of internationalism. Texidor, when she is mentioned at all in literary histories, tends to be represented as Sargeson's creation: she had never written fiction before coming to New Zealand and it was undoubtedly Sargeson who persuaded her to begin. As I describe in Part Two, he remained a solicitous and effective mentor, assiduously

promoting her work to publishers in New Zealand and abroad. Texidor was herself quick to acknowledge that she would never have published anything without his help, and that the loss of his influence was central to the decline of her writing career after leaving New Zealand.

However, this thesis examines the Texidor-Sargeson relationship through a different lens, arguing that it was in fact an *exchange* between two writers launching themselves on very different literary trajectories – one intent on turning herself into a writer, the other embarking on a lengthy period of reinvention. As I will show, the period in which they were closest was one of searching literary and personal self-examination for Sargeson. He was by now the acknowledged master of short fiction in New Zealand, by virtue of the narrative idiom and form he had developed during the 1930s to render “the material of New Zealand life” (“Writing a Novel” 54). But he was also beset by self-doubts, frustrated by the limitations of that material and by the critical realist method he had made his own: he was finding, as Patrick Evans describes, that “[t]he more faithfully language responds to its environment the more thoroughly it mirrors the limitations of the society it is set in, and the more absolutely it cuts off interesting things for a character to do” (*History* 188). In the same period, he was also gradually loosening his connections to the robustly masculine circle of fellow-writers that had sustained him throughout the 1930s, and was forging new literary relationships – including with the wartime immigrants and refugees who had established clusters of cultural influence on the North Shore and elsewhere. One was Karl Wolfskehl, the legendary German-Jewish poet who spent his final years in exile on the North Shore. To Sargeson, the elderly Wolfskehl represented the full force of European culture within which he had tried, unsuccessfully, to find a place as a young man. Despite being initially enamoured, Sargeson eventually withdrew from Wolfskehl, suffocated by the weight of civilisation and learning he embodied.

Texidor, though, was another matter. She embodied European modernity – restless, financially independent, transgressive, a one-time heroin addict, twice divorced, trailing a raft of literary and political connections that were decidedly ‘modern’ too. She had been on the fringes of the Bloomsbury artistic milieu; she had danced the Charleston in theatres from Paris to Buenos Aires; she had fought for the doomed Left in Spain. The Europe to which Texidor offered Sargeson so enticing a bridge was a site of modernity, an altogether alluring destination for a writer seeking to reinvent himself. She was also less a refugee than a nomad, existing in a state that has been described as “homelooseness” rather than exile, tragic and irreparable (Wood 6). Hers was a condition with which Sargeson – with his conflicted sense

of being both at home and an outsider in his own country – could identify. In Texidor’s rootlessness, and her repudiation of the alien environment around her, he saw a reflection of his own marginality. By virtue of his vocation, his background, and his covert homosexuality, he too remained inescapably apart from a national community to which he had nonetheless committed himself.

But Texidor’s work, uneven though it was, also left its impress on Sargeson as he sought to abandon what he called the “constipated perfectionis[m]” of his signature stories in favour of something looser, easier and more exuberant (Shieff, *Letters* 71, 84). When he read Texidor’s European-inflected fiction, particularly “Santa Cristina” and “These Dark Glasses”, he saw an enviable appetite for modernist experimentation and lush verbal play. And in the stories she wrote about New Zealand, he saw modernist literary practices serving alongside critical realism as tools with which to inscribe ‘New Zealandness’ – a stratagem that would increasingly find its way into his own fiction.

After moving to Australia in 1948, Texidor comprehensively arraigned the 1940s New Zealand she had once portrayed as “a leper colony”, a place where intellectuals and writers “had the sad look of a cow gazing over a fence seeing all the juicy pastures of civilisation” (“Goodbye Forever”, *Fifteen Minutes* 208). Perversely, though, it was in this uncongenial environment that she found the tools, discipline and confidence to transform herself into a writer, and here that she produced the only fiction that ever brought her recognition and satisfaction. Sargeson enabled this transformation, but – as this thesis will argue – the traffic was not one-way. Theirs was a mutually productive encounter, a catalyst for reciprocal acts of invention and reinvention in a time of cultural flux.

Structure and method

This thesis weaves together literary analysis, cultural and literary history, and biography. It gives close consideration to the language and form of selected literary works (chiefly by Texidor and Sargeson), but also the personal, social and political conditions out of which they arose. Geographically, it ranges from Auckland’s North Shore to the Blue Mountains of New South Wales to Barcelona. It draws on published work, but also on archival material held in New Zealand and Australia, extensive interviews with Texidor’s daughters (conducted in Sydney and Barcelona), and visits to locations in Spain that stimulated and informed her fiction. The literature review (section 1.4 below) is devoted to the critical re-examination of

the nationalist era by literary scholars and historians. Elsewhere, the thesis takes account of scholarship in areas as diverse as exilic artistic practice, nationalist theory, intermodernism and women's war writing. It attends closely to specifically local literary practices and dilemmas, but also sets them in the context of international movements and styles. It describes both the brief literary efflorescence of a woman whose claims as a 'New Zealand' writer are moot, and a critical turning-point in the development of a local literary icon.

In its diversity of sources and concerns, this thesis thus exemplifies the "fundamentally Janus-faced" nature of the critical discourse surrounding early-to-mid-twentieth century fiction – a discourse that has been described as looking "simultaneously inwards, towards form and language, and outwards, towards the changing material circumstances in which fiction was being produced and consumed" (Wallace 15).

Part One begins by addressing the inescapable: the fortress of literary nationalism that comprehensively dominated accounts of 1940s literature for much of the twentieth century. As poets and prose writers, Curnow, Charles Brasch, A.R.D. Fairburn, Denis Glover, Sargeson and others created the works that came to constitute the period's literary canon. Simultaneously, as critics, anthologists, editors, publishers, reviewers and cultural power-brokers, they determined what that canon should look like. Here, I focus not on their imaginative writing but on the narrative of invention and indigeneity that they and – to an even greater degree – others constructed through their criticism and editorial activity. I also briefly describe subsequent challenges to the hegemony of the nationalist project. From the 1950s onwards, a new generation of writers chipped away at the narrative their elders had created and replaced it with some equally monolithic counter-myths of their own – ironically, often formulated in the very same terms as the myth they wished to destroy, and not always so very different from it.

In 1.4, I survey the body of critical writing that has, since the 1980s, interrogated, expanded, elaborated on and sometimes debunked the literary nationalist narrative and its totalising position. How, this revisionist criticism asks, do we account for the writing and writers that this particular narrative has obscured or excluded? This literature review confirms that the "nationalist frame", considered for so long "the most powerful way of looking at literature and making anthologies" (Stafford and Williams, *Anthology* 3), is not the only possible one. Some literary scholars have proposed alternative ways of reading the work of writers long regarded as little more than recorders of national identity. Some have rehabilitated or

rediscovered writers working outside the nationalist frame. Others have emphasised the strongly internationalist element in the nationalist project itself, and its receptiveness to aesthetic and political influences from elsewhere. Meanwhile, historians have re-characterised the era's literary culture in terms of larger patterns of international cultural traffic, or as part of a transnational narrative spanning many Anglo settler societies.

Finally, Part One takes account of another disruption to the purportedly uniform cultural landscape of the 1940s: the wartime arrival of exilic artists from Europe and elsewhere. In chapter 1.5, I survey their involvement in various artistic and intellectual fields, and identify the few writers from continental Europe working here in the 1940s. It is in this context that I introduce Greville Texidor who, although her background was different from that of other wartime arrivals, nonetheless became part of the exilic milieu. Throughout this section, my purpose is not primarily to record the exiles' contributions to New Zealand cultural life, already the subject of many valuable recent scholarly studies. Rather, I examine the presence of an "exilic sensibility" in their art, and propose that something analogous can also be traced in nationalist writing of the period – a sense of homelessness and estrangement common to all those living with shallow roots in a hostile environment.

The focus of **Part Two** is on the two writers whose coming-together in wartime Auckland helped stimulate the artistic regeneration of one and the invention of the other. First, I examine the disciplined, highly-crafted prose style and narrative form Sargeson had developed in the 1930s, and his growing frustration with its restrictions as the 1940s progressed. He had come to see his role as founder and sentinel of New Zealand's critical realist tradition as another straitjacket; likewise his position as mentor to a generation of aspiring writers. Against this background, I map the development of his literary relationship with Texidor, and consider the extent to which they mutually influenced each other's work – most importantly, I suggest, each was the ideal reader the other needed. Part Two concludes with a discussion of Sargeson's 1945 anthology *Speaking for Ourselves*, an unassuming publication that is nonetheless rich with intimations of the broadening post-war cultural landscape, of Sargeson's progress towards re-invention, of his vexed relationships with his protégés and imitators, and of Texidor's ability to both use and repurpose her mentor's literary model.

Texidor's literary achievement is examined in **Part Three**. It begins by discussing her stylistic development, looking at a selection of her published, unpublished and unfinished

short stories, and tracing the influence of Sargeson and Duggan on their production. Turning to her unpublished Spanish Civil War novel, *Diary of a Militia Woman*, I attend to its treatment of the definitively “modern” experience of war, displacement and trauma, and discuss the extent to which it conforms with and disrupts various conventions of war writing. A discussion of Texidor’s novella *These Dark Glasses* follows. Although the novella is heavily autobiographical, I suggest some alternative readings which situate it (and some of Texidor’s other work) within a range of broader contexts – modernism, literary existentialism and especially the rich, messy and contested body of intermodernist fiction.

Referencing unpublished sources

This thesis makes use of the MLA parenthetical style of referencing *except* in its treatment of unpublished correspondence and interviews conducted by the author. In both cases, as parenthetical citations would be unduly intrusive, essential information appears in footnotes. Where correspondence is undated, or only partly dated, the likely year it was written is shown inside square brackets, followed by a question mark.

Full details of all unpublished sources (file numbers, collection titles and libraries; dates and locations of interviews etc) can be found at the beginning of the list of works cited.

Referencing Texidor’s published work

Unless stated otherwise, all quotations are from *In Fifteen Minutes You Can Say a Lot: Selected Fiction*, ed. Kendrick Smithyman (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1987).

Quotations

Unless otherwise indicated, all ellipsis points in quotations are my insertions.

PART ONE:

THE LITERARY LANDSCAPE OF THE 1940s

CHAPTER 1

Our favourite historical narrative: literary nationalism and the 1940s

In his *Penguin History of New Zealand Literature* (1990), Patrick Evans recalls what he learned of his country's literary history while growing up in the 1950s and '60s:

[We] were told that New Zealand literature had begun almost overnight in 1932, with the arrival in Auckland of a marvellously talented group of young men who had put together a literary magazine called *Phoenix*. Those had been heroic times; there was a depression and a war; everyone read books or wrote them, and what they believed mattered so much they fought for it in the streets. (*History* 7)

In this narrative, the writers who came to prominence in the 1930s were the catalysts and founding fathers of national culture. Their legacy was unimpeachable, and the work they had created, promoted and perpetuated became the wellspring from which all authentic New Zealand literature sprang. Any writing that sounded somehow “different” must, by its very nature, belong “to some other category” and was thus excluded from the canon (*History* 8). So too was any poetry or prose written before ‘New Zealand literature’ was officially invented in the 1930s.

Evans and others came to challenge the limitations of this account, with its inherent assumption “that there is a single story to be told” – linear, stable and uniform (*History* 9). They have argued that the course of New Zealand writing throughout the twentieth century was in fact more fluid, unstable and mutable than this received account acknowledges. Roger Horrocks's provocative revisionist essay “The Invention of New Zealand” (1983) argues that, despite some assiduous myth-making, “The New Zealand tradition has never been monolithic – somewhere there have always been alternative styles of reading, alternative fictions” (3). More recently, as I have noted already, John Newton has characterised New Zealand literature's sources as more complex and, crucially, more transnational than generally imagined (“Allen Curnow” 28). The editors of the 2012 *Auckland University Press Anthology of New Zealand Literature* have reiterated (and, through their selections, demonstrated) that same plurality of origins and practices: Jane Stafford and Mark Williams compare New Zealand literature to a thirsty sponge, “sucking up influences, adopting conventions, accommodating new movements and mimicking alien voices” (*Anthology* 15).

Yet for much of the twentieth century, the possibility of such variety, unruliness and pliability barely registered in the official account of New Zealand's literary history, particularly its portrayal of the 1930s and '40s. Instead, the "nationalist frame was the most powerful way of looking at literature and making anthologies" (Stafford and Williams, *Anthology* 3). As emphasised in a succession of authoritative essays, introductions and reviews, literature was valued most for what it had to say about the condition of being a New Zealander, or for its fidelity to a particular version of the New Zealand experience, or for its repudiation of imported literary influences that were judged to be false or outmoded. Literary nationalism came to seem like a monolithic fortress that entirely dominated the literary landscape of the 1930s and '40s and beyond.

This chapter considers, first, how that apparent dominance came about. It then turns to the heterodox critical perspectives on the period that have emerged since the 1980s. This body of criticism suggests that international influences and different modes of expression were always rubbing up against literary nationalism, refashioning and enlarging it even when its champions seemed to be asserting its purity and freedom from outside contamination. This thesis, by shedding light on an exilic writer in the 1940s and her association with literary nationalism's most influential prose writer, is part of this critical re-examination.

But the fortress cannot be ignored: it forms the inescapable background against which Texidor, Sargeson and their mutually productive relationship must be projected. I turn first, therefore, to the initial articulations of literary nationalism by its founding fathers: the writers involved with *Phoenix* and/or the Caxton Press, including Allen Curnow, Frank Sargeson, Charles Brasch, John Mulgan, A.R.D. Fairburn and Denis Glover. Their influence was uniquely wide-ranging. Not only did they produce the definitive literature of the nationalist project: as critics, editors, publishers and mentors, they were also its leading theoreticians, apologists, arbiters and protectors. In these roles, they were supported by others who were not primarily imaginative writers but nonetheless helped make literary nationalism the era's definitive cultural narrative; they include critics and essayists Monte Holcroft, E. H. McCormick and H. Winston Rhodes. Collectively, I describe these two intersecting groups as the '*Phoenix-Caxton writers*'.² This section also briefly accounts for the next phase of literary

² Finding a catch-all term for those who defined, created, critiqued and published the literature of cultural nationalism is difficult, but necessary to avoid long-windedness. I have opted to use the term "*Phoenix-Caxton writers*", rather than Patrick Evans's "*Phoenix generation*" (*History* 8 ff.) or Lawrence Jones's "first-generation Provincial writers" (*Picking Up the Traces* 14 ff.). Both of those

nationalism, in which it was variously sustained and reviled by a new generation of writers and critics, and also its prolonged afterlife.

1.1 The founding fathers

In the standard narrative of literary nationalism described by Evans, the “marvellously talented” founders of *Phoenix* figure as the movement’s progenitors (*History* 7). It is a weighty responsibility for a mere handful of young students and a short-lived journal that survived for only four issues. *Phoenix* (originally *The Phoenix*) was launched in 1932 by a group linked to Auckland University College’s Literary Club. Key figures were the first editor James Bertram, his successor R.A.K. Mason, typographer and printer Robert Lowry, and contributors including Curnow, E.K. Cook, Ian Milner, Brasch, Fairburn and J.C. Beaglehole (Hamilton and Robinson 440). Some of the same names were soon also associated with the Caxton Press, which began as a student club at Canterbury University College before becoming a fully-fledged commercial enterprise under Denis Glover in 1935. Other writers linked to Caxton in its early years included Anton Vogt, Sargeson, Holcroft and D’Arcy Cresswell (Simpson, “Caxton” 95). Collectively, these writers comprised the nucleus of the *Phoenix*-Caxton group.

Read in the expectation of finding a manifesto of the literary nationalist project, or abundant examples of its literature, *Phoenix* is disappointing. The four issues share an abiding interest in sex – “We are a vigorous people ... heavily sexed in a strange and stimulating climate” writes E.K. Cook luridly in the third issue (2.1, 55) – communism, and its own ability to scandalise the establishment: *Truth*’s description of its “sneers, jeers, bellicose blasphemies,

descriptions evoke a linear, stable progression of literary movements and schools, an impression this thesis is aiming to avoid.

I am aware that by confining my focus to a few well-known names, I unavoidably perpetuate the exclusions and assumptions embedded in the literary myth-making Evans describes. The writers and ways of writing excluded from the dominant myth have been the focus of recent criticism, much of it attending to the work of women such as Ursula Bethell, Eileen Duggan, Robin Hyde and Jane Mander. They were kept at arms-length by the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers and have thus remained largely absent from the story of New Zealand literature’s miraculous birth in the 1930s. The reasons for, and consequences of, such exclusions are too various to be discussed here. In Robin Hyde’s case, for example, contributing factors included her loyalties to particular members of the literary old guard who were reviled by Curnow, Glover and others; her lengthy absences from New Zealand; and the well-documented misogyny of some associated with *Phoenix* and the Caxton Press (see Leggott).

red rantings and sex-saturated sophistries” is gleefully quoted in the fourth issue (2.2, 1). There are reviews of local university literary magazines and overseas titles such as *The coming struggle for power*, *Experimental cinema* and *Where stands socialism today?* Translations of poetry by Rilke and Apollinaire are featured. Imaginative writing occupies relatively little space: the second issue has the most but, even so, short stories and poems occupy fewer than forty per cent of its pages. Most creative pieces are unremarkable and conventional, and show little obvious interest in nationalism. One exception is Mason’s story “His End Was Peace” (1.2, 5-16), which features a recognisably New Zealand rural setting and a rather odd rendering of the local vernacular. Not entirely successfully, the story describes a quasi-spiritual encounter between a farmer and the land he has stripped, shaped and subdued for profit, ending with his mental collapse.

It is more through its editorials and letters that *Phoenix* can be seen as kindling the fires of literary nationalism. In the first issue, Bertram lists its aims: “the integration of national consciousness, the focussing of contemporary opinion upon local needs, the creation of cultural antennae, the communication of definite standards of taste, the ‘redeeming of the times’.” He affirms a belief in the role of local culture as “a spiritualising agency”. *Phoenix* will be more than a university magazine; it will be “something of dominion significance”, publishing the young writers “to whom this country must look, if it is to look anywhere, for a national literature” (1.1, n.p.). This *Phoenix* has not so much risen from the ashes as alighted fully-formed in virgin territory. There is a sense of excited urgency at the job ahead, as D’Arcy Cresswell acknowledges in the same issue: “It is now or never with culture here” (1.1, n.p.). *Phoenix* would not just critique an emerging literary culture: it would help create one at the very time it was most needed.

However, under Bertram, *Phoenix* seems concerned less with a nationalist agenda than with promoting what Lawrence Jones calls a Eurocentric “programme of high culture” (*Picking Up the Traces* 23). This bias dismayed some readers. A letter complaining about the journal’s rarefied tone and preference for “scholarship rather than art” appeared in the second issue, while E.K. Cook lamented the absence of “a healthy scent of our own” (1.2, 39, 34). With the arrival of the Marxist Mason as editor of the third issue in March 1933 – Bertram having left for England on a Rhodes Scholarship – the journal’s tone becomes less consciously aesthetic, and its concerns more overtly political. In his first editorial, Mason declares the magazine will no longer solely reflect the world of the university (which has no “monopoly of

wisdom”, even if it has the monopoly of privilege): “there are as good brains to be found on the wharf, down the stokehold, in the slave-camp, in the mines” (2.1, 6). *Phoenix*’s political content expands, with discussions of anti-semitism, Marxism and the failures of bourgeois democracy worldwide. It is pitched in battle not only with the conservatism and mediocrity of local culture but also with the global forces of unbridled capitalism, fascism and “a dying economic order which would kill us in its death-throes” (2:2, 3).

Thus, whether reflecting Bertram’s more literary interests or Mason’s political convictions, the four issues of *Phoenix* are concerned as much with developments in the wider world – trends in English literary criticism, the Depression, the rise of fascism – as with forging an indigenous cultural identity. Its interests are international and ideological, as well as local and literary. In its design and typography, too, the journal demonstrates a determined cosmopolitanism and a clear debt to the modernist aesthetics of contemporary English periodicals, notably John Middleton Murry’s *New Adelphi*. The obvious influence of Bloomsbury clearly grated with some readers who felt a more muscular, rough-hewn aesthetic better befitted a New Zealand journal. An epigram published in Canterbury University College’s short-lived *Oriflamme* (1933) mocked the *Phoenix* editorial team’s apparent aspiration to “stablish Bloomsbury / In this untutored, naked land” (quoted in L. Jones, *Picking Up the Traces* 37). However, that same year saw the end of *Phoenix*. Its demise came not as a result of arguments about aesthetics, content or editorial policy but because the all-important Lowry decamped abruptly to Christchurch, leaving a trail of debts behind him (*Picking Up the Traces* 34).

Whether it was ever as revolutionary or indigenous as its founders claimed, *Phoenix* undeniably brought vigour and a sense of new beginnings at a time when the country’s cultural life was at a decidedly low ebb. It provided a platform for the young writers who would play a pivotal role in New Zealand’s literary life for decades to come, and a launching pad for other influential publications. The Christchurch radical journal *Tomorrow*, for example, was founded in 1934 soon after *Phoenix*’s demise, absorbing many of its predecessor’s talents and unleashing new ones. Its editorial committee included the Australian Marxist, H. Winston Rhodes, who had just been appointed English professor at Canterbury University College, and the student-cum-printer Denis Glover. It regularly featured work by Curnow, Fairburn and Sargeson, whose gradual mastery of the stripped-

down prose style that would become his signature can be traced in his contributions.³ Also in 1934, Caxton Club Press published *New Poems*, an anthology which has been called “the best statement” of the literary nationalist project and, in literary terms, “far superior to *Phoenix*” (L. Jones, *Picking Up the Traces* 40–41).

The project inaugurated by the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers was primarily an oppositional one, conceived as a response to the dispirited (and dispiriting) literary culture of the early 1930s. According to E.H. McCormick, after some stirrings of national self-consciousness in the 1890s when writers and artists had become “romantically aware of their unique position as the first generation of a new state”,⁴ the impetus to build a distinctive independent literature had largely petered out (*Letters and Art* 105). With some pride, most New Zealand writers considered themselves transplanted contributors to the English tradition. The country’s first anthology of local short stories, published in London in 1930, announced unapologetically that readers would find in it little evidence of “any national outlook or distinctive atmosphere”. From pioneering times, wrote its editor O.N. Gillespie, New Zealanders had been united by a single purpose, and that purpose now shaped their artistic vision: “They sought, and still seek, to refashion in these islands the homeland they had left” (*New Zealand Short Stories*, v). The result, wrote H. Winston Rhodes in 1945, was unvaried mediocrity: “the same forced sentiment, the same forced humour, the same belabouring of the differences between life in England and life in New Zealand, the same exploitation of the romantic possibilities of the Maoris”. Only rarely, he complained, could “a real emotion, a real scene, a real human being” be glimpsed, much less “a writer engaged in the genuine exploration of the human scene [and able] to give significance and form to a passing fragment of experience” (“Short Stories” 5).

The poetic counterpart to Gillespie’s anthology was Quentin Pope’s collection *Kowhai Gold* (1930), which brought together work by fifty-six local poets. Admirable in quantity, the quality on display in Pope’s anthology is, however, highly variable. Couched in imitative

³ See chapter 3.2 for a more detailed discussion of the techniques Sargeson “discovered” when writing the *Tomorrow* stories.

⁴ McCormick puts William Pember Reeves, Jessie Mackay, Edith Searle Grossman and others at the vanguard of this late nineteenth-century literary nationalism, which coincided with what James Belich calls a time of recolonisation: “a renewal and reshaping of links between colony and metropolis after an earlier period of colonisation”. Between the 1880s and the 1920s, says Belich, recolonisation “transformed New Zealand’s economy, technology, politics, conceptual geography, history and ideology, and penetrated directly or indirectly into almost every other sphere”; from then on “the recolonial system was firmly ensconced at the helm of New Zealand history” (*Paradise* 29, 31).

language and well-worn forms, much of it registers an unassuaged yearning for ‘Home’ by writers McCormick characterises as “spiritual exiles [who] found it more natural to use the traditional language of English poets than the very different idiom of their own country” (*Letters and Art* 161). To emerging poets such as Curnow, the work of the *Kowhai Gold* school was a “sickly second-growth of verse, in which imported insipidities were mixed with puerilities of local origin” (*PBNZV* 1960 56). It bore the reviled taint of Georgianism, which the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers regarded with the same fashionable disdain as their English contemporaries to whom ‘Georgian’ – once a signifier of freshness and innovation – was now a byword for “an exhausted post-Victorian traditionalism” (Robinson, “Georgian” 200). The dabbings of these “tui and treacle”⁵ versifiers were also embarrassingly amateurish. Fairburn wrote with disgust to Glover in 1934 about the lingering enthusiasm for “the Georgian week-end notion of poetry” (quoted in Ogilvie 79) – anathema to writers engaged in the important and high-minded task of building a national literature.⁶

Thus, the literary nationalist project was, firstly, an attack on the derivative and gauche literary tradition its proponents had inherited. Recoiling from the “colonial literaturishness” of the past, they called for a new approach to representing the local (Curnow, “New Zealand Literature” 200). Although a national literature that was genuinely ‘ours’ would arise only when the New Zealand writer was demonstrably a “creature of [their] time and place”, this did not necessitate “paraphrasing [the] scenery” (*BNZV* 1951 49, 48). Indeed, wrote Curnow, “The good poem is something we may in time come to recognise New Zealand by, not something in which we need expect to recognise obvious traces of the New Zealand we know” (*BNZV* 1945 22).

But as well as repudiating the prevailing literary tradition, the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers were also pitting themselves against the literary establishment that allowed the tradition to flourish. They had in their sights the cadre of journalists, critics, amateur historians and self-styled “bookmen” who held the reins of local publishing and reviewing, and, in some cases, were

⁵ Poet, short-story writer and playwright Isobel Andrews (b. 1905) coined this evocative term (L. Jones, *Picking Up the Traces* 222); her own fiction has been described as “tend[ing] to the florid (Robinson, “Andrews” 15).

⁶ Following the cue of Curnow and others, Pope’s anthology was widely reviled as a showcase for meritless sentimental verse. However, it has been the subject of critical re-examination, notably by Trixie Te Arama Menzies in *Landfall* 165, 1988, and Paula Green and Harry Ricketts in *99 Ways into New Zealand Poetry* (Auckland: Vintage, 2010). They point to Pope’s often-overlooked inclusion of poets of the stature of Fairburn, Mason, Hyde and Eileen Duggan. Menzies also shows that Curnow’s introduction to the *Book of New Zealand Verse* contains several factual errors (Menzies 22–24).

also published poets and novelists (Hilliard, *The Bookmen*). They included Alan Mulgan, Charles Marris, John Schroder and Pat Lawlor, all of whom the younger writers regarded as dictatorial, Anglophilic and hopelessly old-fashioned in their literary tastes. They attacked them mercilessly and personally, most famously Glover with his vicious satiric poem “The Arraignment of Paris” (1937). Recent scholarship has sought to rescue the reputations of these establishment figures. Chris Hilliard has pointed to the very significant support they gave to women writers (which can hardly be said of the *Phoenix*-Caxton group), their efforts to stimulate public interest in New Zealand history, and their still-relevant call for New Zealand “to honour its writers as it did its rugby players” (*The Bookmen* 118). Others have pointed to a sometimes surprising convergence of viewpoints between this much-reviled ‘old guard’ and the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers. In 1936, Quentin Pope, of all people, noted the absence of a “really distinctive” local literature and writers’ timid adherence to the English tradition, while O.N. Gillespie said “slavish imitation and a derivative laziness” were holding back New Zealand literature (quoted in L. Jones, *Picking Up the Traces* 79–80). The often-scorned Alan Mulgan, meanwhile, would go on to select some of the *Phoenix*-Caxton poets for his 1950 *Oxford Anthology of Australian and New Zealand Verse*. But despite such gestures, the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers largely dismissed the possibility of common ground with the elder statesmen. It suited their purposes to vilify the literary establishment: if they were to create a revolution, they first needed “a named literary enemy” to pit themselves against (*Picking Up the Traces* 51).

Beyond rejecting the specifically *literary* practices and culture they had inherited, the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers were also rejecting something bigger: the progressivist colonial myth that had been steadily building since European settlement had begun nearly one hundred years earlier. This myth held that New Zealand was “God’s Own Country”, a prosperous pastoral paradise built by pioneers who had tamed the bush, subdued the natives with a firm yet kind hand, and formed themselves into a decent, fair, egalitarian outpost of Britain. This mythic New Zealand embodied all that was best about the British way of life while jettisoning its less palatable features – the class system, the overcrowded cities, the poverty. By the 1930s, most New Zealanders still thought of Britain as a loving parent, but no longer cast themselves as clinging infants nor uprooted Britons of the South: they were youthful and confident Empire-builders, ‘Better Britons’ who could both defend and invigorate the mother country (Belich, *Paradise* 76–78).

The *Phoenix*-Caxton writers did not merely challenge this powerful colonial myth: they demolished it and replaced it with what Curnow called their own “anti-myth” (“Author’s Note to *Collected Poems*” 244). Unlike previous generations, they rejected the idea of England as a spiritual home.⁷ John Mulgan (whose father Alan wrote *Home: A New Zealander’s Adventure* in 1927, an unabashed salute to the colonial myth and to Empire) was profoundly disillusioned by the real England he encountered in the 1930s, “a despoiled country” scarred by poverty and social inequality (17–19). Historian and poet J.C. Beaglehole discovered that “to go home” to England was a form of exile: he chose instead to return to New Zealand to help unlock “the unconscious New Zealand tradition” (quoted in L. Jones, *Picking Up the Traces* 220). Sargeson, despite assiduously cultivating literary contacts in London throughout his life, rejected both England and Europe as imaginative homes. Recalling a European walking holiday taken in the late 1920s, he wrote of having “to visit Europe to discover that I was truly a New Zealander” (*Once* 111).⁸

Other tenets of the colonial myth were likewise torn down by the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers. Where their elders celebrated a society built on solid yet modest values – the old virtues of “thrift, industry, respect, good manners and unselfishness”, as one novel of the 1930s wistfully recalled (Scanlan, *Kelly Pencarrow* 19) – the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers saw a society suffocating under the weight of repressive Puritanism. Where the colonial myth portrayed a smiling and fertile land tamed by the pioneers’ toil, the anti-myth depicted a country that had been “stripped and broken”⁹ for profit, leaving only a few remnants of sinister bush. It was a strange land in which New Zealanders were strangers still (Finlayson, *Our Life* 16). Conventional accounts of New Zealand’s ‘discovery’ by Abel Tasman figured him as a brave explorer on a civilising mission: Curnow’s “Landfall in Unknown Seas” described his journey’s mercenary aims and “the disappointment of arrival and the diminution of the

⁷ Although often not until they had taken the chance to travel or study there, a privilege available only to New Zealand’s cultural and intellectual elite. And of course, they continued to avidly seek publication in Britain (see 1.4).

⁸ However, as Sargeson’s later friendships with Greville Texidor, Karl Wolfskehl and others would demonstrate, his emotional and intellectual relationship with Europe remained decidedly contradictory: see chapter 4. Moreover, the seam of retrospective myth-making in Sargeson’s 1973 autobiography cannot be ignored. As Stuart Murray has pointed out, Sargeson’s account of his European travels in the autobiography differs significantly from the travel memoir “A New Tramp Abroad” he wrote soon after returning to New Zealand. To Murray, the manifest changes in Sargeson’s attitude to his subject matter show not only a desire to “forge a style which he felt suited his purposes” but also “the degree of myth that went into Sargeson’s later portrayal of his life and work” (“New Tramp” 72, 67).

⁹ Curnow, “Not in Narrow Seas” (1939). *Collected Poems* 58.

human spirit” that accompanied it (Evans, *History* 96). And while the official myth spoke proudly of social and economic progress, the young writers had experienced first-hand the social and emotional devastation of the Depression. Indeed, to some, it was the Depression that made a national literature both possible and necessary, its impact on “rebellious young minds” unleashing artistic expression in “a silent country which at last learned to be articulate” (Hyde, *Disputed Ground* 347).¹⁰

Thus, under the gaze of the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers, what seemed like an affirming narrative of settlement became, as Alex Calder has written, a narrative of unsettlement and failure to adapt (“Unsettling Settlement” 171). Yet as the 1940s commenced, the colonial myth continued to be officially endorsed. It was the focus of extravagant celebrations during New Zealand’s Centennial in 1940, an event designed to express the nation’s distinctive (yet still unwaveringly British) identity and sell it to the world. Although necessarily subdued by the Depression and the outbreak of war, the celebrations broadcast the progressivist story through many mediums – commissioned publications, a permanent exhibition that attracted more than two million visitors to Wellington, literary and drama competitions, and more. But amid all the “flatulent nationalism”, expressions of dissent were distinctly audible (Evans, *History* 92). Even some of the authorised Centennial Historical Surveys hinted that New Zealand might be outgrowing the triumphant colony-to-nation story. McCormick’s *Letters and Art in New Zealand* (1940), while acknowledging New Zealand’s place within the British cultural tradition and indeed “the tradition of European civilisation”, unreservedly praised young writers of the 1930s for challenging the “complacency ... the supremacy of material standards ... the attitude of timid provincialism which had characterised New Zealand writing” (195, 170). He commended the work of John Mulgan and Sargeson “who accept the New Zealand scene not as something to be apologised for or explained”. And he quoted Hyde’s call for her generation to be remembered as the one which freed itself from the colonial myth – the one which “loved England still, but ... ceased to be ‘for ever England’”

¹⁰ The extent to which the Depression *caused* the literary revolution that was cultural nationalism, or stimulated a revolution that was already underway, is contested. Many *Phoenix*-Caxton writers shared Hyde’s position: Curnow considered the Depression had been instrumental to their “making a new discovery of their country” (*BNZV* 1945 41). But some later commentators, such as Ian Reid (*Fiction and the Great Depression*, 1979), see a less causative connection, arguing that literary responses to the Depression were in fact essentially apolitical and concerned mostly with personal experience. Lawrence Jones accommodates both positions. While many of the cultural nationalists’ concerns predated and existed independently of the Depression, Jones maintains the Depression undoubtedly “sharpened their awareness of the gap between the myths of New Zealand accepted by the older generation and the actual New Zealand in which they were living” (*Picking Up the Traces* 310).

and which “became, for as long as we have a country, New Zealand” (*Letters and Art* 178). Holcroft’s *The Deepening Stream*, which won the Centennial essay competition, went further, describing New Zealand as “a cultural appanage of Britain”, whose people were “still strangers in the land” and lacked “any real depth of spiritual life” (62, 21, 28). Another survey, Oliver Duff’s *New Zealand Now*, also registered New Zealanders’ alienation from their environment and described them as “aesthetically inarticulate”, suspicious of intellectuals and repressed by Puritanism (quoted in L. Jones, “Myth” 213). Less tendentiously, Sargeson’s “The Making of a New Zealander”, joint winner of the Centennial short story competition, took the same position: it has been suggested that this story shows “that to be a New Zealander after 100 years of European settlement is to be emotionally repressed, relentlessly practical and literal, materialistic, lacking any close relationship with the land and valuing only the money to be made from it” (L. Jones, *Picking Up the Traces* 287).¹¹

So while the Centennial was designed to trumpet the story of nationhood, that story was, by 1940, losing its lustre. At least to some, the colonial myth now seemed a falsehood. The nation that once considered itself a “privileged happyland” (Curnow, “Author’s Note to *Collected Poems*” 244) had been forever transformed by the Depression and, now, by war; even ‘official’ New Zealand seemed to accept something had changed.¹² The *Phoenix-Caxton* writers had influenced that shift by helping to create a climate in which it was possible for the consoling national story – New Zealand as a uniquely favoured beacon of progress and decency, a better Britain – to be scrutinised and found wanting.

1.2 The anthologies of 1945

The ideas and positions I have shown the *Phoenix-Caxton* writers developing throughout the 1930s were most comprehensively articulated in two Caxton Press anthologies published in

¹¹ See chapter 4.3 for a fuller discussion of “The Making of a New Zealander”.

¹² Although the degree of official acceptance of this view should not be overstated. As Rachel Barrowman’s “History and Romance: The Making of the Centennial Historical Surveys” explains, disclaimers accompanying the authorised surveys allowed the government to distance itself from statements and opinions it considered unpalatable. Moreover, the process for commissioning, vetting and producing these publications was highly politicised: Barrowman notes, for example, that W.B. Sutch’s history of social services was dropped after multiple drafts and revisions, including an unfavourable review by the Prime Minister (“History and Romance” 169–70).

1945: Curnow's *A Book of New Zealand Verse, 1923-45* and Sargeson's collection of short stories by fifteen local writers, *Speaking for Ourselves*. It is to these definitive statements of literary nationalism, and to Curnow's and Sargeson's later iterations, that I turn now.

First, though, the important differences between the particular variety of literary nationalism emerging in New Zealand in the 1930s, and its manifestations elsewhere, need acknowledging. Its strongest affinities were with other white settler societies, notably Australia and Canada. Both countries had, like New Zealand, experienced an earlier effusion of nationalist writing in the late nineteenth century. But twentieth-century nationalist writers in these other countries did not share the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers' contempt for their colonial antecedents. Indeed, as Stafford and Williams have commented, Australia's late colonial literature has remained "at the centre" of the canon, while Canadian writers and critics regard theirs with reverence. In New Zealand, however, "the nationalist story of moving away from a shameful Englishness towards a gratifyingly independent New Zealandness" meant colonial literature was largely shunned, certainly by the writers of the 1930s and '40s (*Anthology* 3). In other respects, though, twentieth-century literary nationalism followed a similar – if not necessarily simultaneous – course across the three settler countries. This was no jubilant celebration of independent nationhood, no nostalgic reprise of what the nation might once have been (a discernible strand in early twentieth-century Irish cultural nationalism, for example). Nationalist writers in the settler world did not conceive of literature as an instrument of anti-colonial struggle or resistance (as did writers in the decolonising world, like Chinua Achebe in Nigeria, for example). Rather, as Elleke Boehmer has written, they wrote out of a common "perception of non-identity", as "cultural migrants, overburdened with values and attitudes which belonged in an older or other world," acutely conscious of the lack of fit between an imported aesthetic vocabulary and the reality of their location (204). In poetry and prose, they grappled with both the existential question, "where is here?" (Boehmer 205, quoting Canadian critic Northrop Frye), and the aesthetic one, "how can 'here' be written into existence?". Their work was thus often preoccupied with geography and history, with naming the local, with mapping human stories onto an alien or apparently unoccupied land, with finding idioms and forms matched to their own place and nowhere else. In some cases, this meant reclaiming and validating local vernacular traditions: like Sargeson, Australian poet Les Murray idealised and celebrated the "demotic nation" (Boehmer 209).¹³

¹³ In fact, Bruce King suggests it was Sargeson's classic stories that showed Australian poets "ways of reproducing common lower-and middle-class speech" (*New Literatures* 13)

Particularly among later nationalist novelists, Boehmer also finds “the contingency of settler existence” inflecting their fiction with a concomitant looseness, mobility and provisionality, both formal and linguistic (210–11).

Thus, the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers’ nationalism (a label deplored by many of those it was attached to, including Curnow) can perhaps best be understood as an exercise in reverse engineering – a wholesale repudiation of the colonial settlement project which, by the end of the 1930s, was popularly imagined to be reaching its triumphant conclusion. Theirs was an essentially *contrarian* project: they wanted to quarrel with their elders, to unsettle what seemed to be well-settled, and to clear away all that was false and stale with the vigour of a purifying “hard frost” (Brasch, *Indirections* 391). Perhaps to a greater extent than their Australian and Canadian counterparts, they imagined themselves on a mission of moral and aesthetic regeneration.

There are several reasons to consider Curnow’s 1945 Caxton Press anthology as a definitive expression of this project. Most strikingly, it announces a new national poetic canon, which Curnow endorses and enlarges in the later edition published in 1951 (with a new introduction), and in his two subsequent anthologies published by Penguin (1960 and 1966). In the 1945 volume, Curnow claims to have jettisoned the past, discarding most poets featured in *Kowhai Gold* and other earlier national anthologies.¹⁴ Only sixteen poets make his cut: the oldest, Arnold Wall, was born in 1869 but most were born after 1900 – Beaglehole, Fairburn, Mason, Brasch, Basil Dowling, Curnow himself and Glover among them. Two women are included, Robin Hyde, who had died in 1939, and Ursula Bethell who died the year the anthology appeared. Curnow says he would have included Eileen Duggan too, despite harshly criticising her work in his introduction, but she refused him permission.¹⁵ The 1951 anthology features additional poems by the same poets, but newcomers are also included. Baxter is still the youngest, but the new additions include Ruth Dallas (born 1919), Keith Sinclair and Kendrick Smithyman (both born 1922). In the 1960 Penguin anthology, Curnow casts his eye further back. As a matter of “propriety”, he includes some traditional

¹⁴ It has been pointed out that Curnow’s cull was not as severe as he claimed: in fact, only five of the poets he selected (including Curnow himself) had never before appeared in a national anthology (Menzies 24).

¹⁵ According to Duggan’s biographer, she turned down Curnow’s initial requests “because she was unsympathetic to the project and to its editor” (Leggott 282).

Māori poetry in English and also “salvage[s]” work by a handful of earlier colonial poets such as Alfred Domett (*PBNZV* 1960 20, 19). He adds work by three more women; Gloria Rawlinson and, from earlier eras, Blanche Baughan and Katherine Mansfield.¹⁶ There is an updated selection of James K. Baxter’s work, and more by Baxter’s contemporaries – Louis Johnson, Alistair Campbell, W.H. Oliver and C.K. Stead among them.¹⁷

Justifying his inclusion of the precocious Baxter, aged just eighteen in 1945, in the original *Book of New Zealand Verse*, Curnow argued Baxter had already proved “his power to say and his right to speak” by writing some poems “which could only be his and only a New Zealander’s” (*BNZV* 1945 55). But elsewhere, Curnow is equally insistent that poetic value in no way corresponds to “the obviously New Zealand mark or signature” (“Conversation” 252). Rather disingenuously, he claims simply to have chosen the poems he liked best. Yet what he likes best, his anthologies attest, is poetry animated by a vision that is emphatically “local and special”, that belongs here and nowhere else, that reflects this country’s “peculiar pressures – pressures arising from the isolation of the country, its physical character, and its history” (*PBNZV* 1960 17).

It was not only Curnow’s selections that made the first anthology so important in the literary landscape of the 1940s. His introduction, read in conjunction with those he wrote for the later volumes, provides one of the clearest, most deliberate and ‘purest’ expressions of mid-century literary nationalism. Collectively, these essays substantiate, clarify and give weight to the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers’ earlier pronouncements about identity, nation and the social purposes of poetry.

The first introduction was the product of a decade’s critical thinking about poetry and New Zealand literature. In it, Curnow sets out to dissect the failures of the past and put forward a new poetics. In part, it is a pragmatic programme of quality improvement he seeks. Even without taking account of *what* they chose to write about and how, the work of most poets

¹⁶ Duggan again declined Curnow permission to publish the poems he had selected, and her lawyers threatened legal action until Curnow removed certain comments about her work from the introduction (Leggott 283–84).

¹⁷ These inclusions were not without controversy. Campbell, Baxter and Johnson got hold of advance proofs and, dismayed at Curnow’s selections, threatened to withdraw their work. In combination with the protests from the Duggan camp, this sideshow delayed publication by two years and represented “an interesting if uncoordinated pincer movement” by two generations of poets, each bucking against what “[they] perceived as an unwelcome prescriptiveness in the Caxton-Penguin line” (Leggott 284).

publishing before 1930 was “trivial, fanciful, simply bad” (*BNZV 1945* 16).¹⁸ He has regard for certain colonial poets writing before “sentimental twilight” (20) descended around the turn of the century, and this presumably led him to eventually include poets such as Domett and Bracken in the later anthologies. But most verse written after the 1890s was the product of the nostalgic provincial mind, he says, forever looking back to an unreal England of “colonial fragment and fantasy” (21). Trapped in the tradition of Tennyson and Browning, versifiers reached for poetic “approximations, substitutes, genteel subterfuges, mimicries” with which to render a reality that was “forbiddingly different” from anything the English poets had encountered (20). Cliché and indigenous decorative effects ran riot. Curnow singles out the early work of Duggan and Hyde to show how even “talents above the commonplace could be drawn into the habit of sentimental posturing” (24).

Poetry that lacks a connection with local reality, “any vital relation to experience” (16), vexes Curnow as much as tired poetic language. He scorns the absence of “‘social content,’ the explicit reference of a poem to problems or facts of social life in a New Zealand environment” (16). By 1951, he defines appropriate content in even more emphatically nationalist terms, demanding poetry address “the condition of being a New Zealander ... those very anxieties about our footing upon our own soil, our standing in the world, which must continue to inhibit us as a people” (*BNZV 1951* 48). He continues to commend poets who recognise that the challenge facing the New Zealand writer is not only what to write *about* “but whom they were to write *for*” (*BNZV 1945* 17).¹⁹ The only possible answer, he says, is to write for a local audience with whom the writer shares (in T.S. Eliot’s words) “a common inheritance and a common cause” (45). His assertion invokes celebrated cultural nationalist movements such as the Polish Romantics or the Irish revival, whose leaders (according to cultural nationalist theory) typically sought “the moral regeneration of the historic community, or, in other words, the re-creation of their distinctive national civilization” (Hutchinson 16). But Curnow’s understanding of the writer’s relationship with his or her audience is somewhat different. The compact he imagines is neither comforting nor comfortable. It is not for writers to celebrate the nation as it is, nor to nostalgically re-create what it once was. Nor is literature to be a tool of insurrection. Rather, it is the writer’s task to

¹⁸ Unless stated, otherwise all references in this paragraph and the next are to this source.

¹⁹ Interestingly, Curnow attributes this remark to a refugee living in New Zealand, suggesting (as I shall discuss in chapter 1.5) that the cultural nationalist programme and the concerns of exiled writers were surprisingly compatible.

discomfort the reader with something harsher and more truthful, “a real expression of what the New Zealander is” (*BNZV 1945* 15); it is the reader’s task to consider whether this is all the New Zealander could and should be.

Throughout the 1940s and ’50s, Curnow’s critical writing reiterated the themes explored in his first two introductions – the need for poetry that expresses a collective identity and reality, that makes “assertions about New Zealand itself” (“Review of *Blow, Winds of Fruitfulness*” 100). But this prescriptiveness modified as his own public and declamatory poetic voice, exemplified by “Landfall in Unknown Seas” (1942), grew more interior and indirect. By the time he wrote his introduction to the 1960 Penguin collection, he considered poetry less a medium for “assertions” than a vision of reality that sprang from (and could only spring from) the poet’s relationship with his country: “Whatever is true vision belongs, here, uniquely to the islands of New Zealand” (*PBNZV 1960* 17). By 1963, Curnow was conceding it was no longer necessary for the local writer to be so *consciously* a “prophet to the people” as he had said in 1945. In fact, a writer could:

cease to worry very much about whether he is writing ‘New Zealand literature’, since if he writes well enough New Zealand literature will take care of itself. If he is a New Zealander, owing the first opening of his mind and senses to this country, then *all* that he writes well will be mediated by this land and this people. (“New Zealand Literature” 203)

Thus, New Zealand writing demands attention not as a local phenomenon but as a contribution to the universal literary canon; its quality now derives not from conspicuous engagement with “the condition of being a New Zealander” but from the authenticity and acuity of the writer’s vision.

Compared with the *Book of New Zealand Verse*, the short story anthology Sargeson edited the same year made a more subdued impact, both immediately and longer-term. *Speaking for Ourselves* was not commercially successful and nor was it the start of a series, as its editor hoped. The reviews were lukewarm. H. Winston Rhodes (who reviewed it twice) commended the choice of New Zealand-set stories that were “interested in the human situation” and by authors “who seemed to be at home in their own country” (“Short Stories” 5). But *The Otago Daily Times* accused it of a “literary self-consciousness” which diminished its popular appeal: its value to New Zealand literature was described (in a reference to Joyce’s banned *Ulysses*) as “emetic” (“Melancholia and Murder” 5). But for some local readers, and especially for young writers, the anthology was both liberating and welcoming. Reading it, Janet Frame

recalled the feeling “of having been an orphan who discovers that her parents are alive and living in the most desirable home – pages of prose and poetry” (*An Autobiography* 193).

As I detail further in chapter 5, Sargeson found compiling the volume an uncongenial task. Finding only five of the many unsolicited manuscripts submitted were publishable, he resorted to shoulder-tapping promising young writers for contributions. He took stories from two writers he considered indifferent but to whom he owed favours (E.P. Dawson and the Australian Max Harris) and chose his own “The Hole that Jack Dug” to close the collection. His selections cover a much shorter period of time than Curnow’s: apart from Finlayson and Sargeson himself, most contributors had been publishing only since 1940.

Sargeson’s introduction – short and workmanlike – is also significantly different in scope and tone to Curnow’s. He neither critically appraises the work of his contributors nor places them in a historical context. He makes no claim to be establishing a new tradition or sweeping away the past. His only wish is to offer readers “the greatest possible variety” of stories by writers living in their own country (*Speaking* 7). Like Curnow, Sargeson is emphatic that this is fiction *of* New Zealand, written primarily for a New Zealand audience.

Lydia Wevers finds considerable significance in this brief and somewhat disingenuous introduction – or more precisely, in its subtext. When Sargeson invokes the challenges of writing in a country which “can’t exactly be described as over-generous in its encouragement of its own writers”, he reminds his readers of their personal and social responsibilities. He is consciously drawing them into a shared enterprise which involves this country’s struggling writers, the product his readers hold in their hands, and the national culture which this anthology is both reflecting and creating. Thus, argues Wevers:

A metonymic relation between text, authorship and nation, with the subtle pressure of the social responsibility of readers as a factor in those connections, is locked into place. The readers who will respond to these writers will also reconfigure the nation. Texts and their production and reception are processes by which the nation shows itself. (Wevers, “Speaking” 100)

In this sense, Sargeson echoes Curnow’s proposal for an Eliotesque compact between writer and reader, in which the former speaks to the latter out of a common experience and heritage. Effectively, Sargeson’s introduction frames literary nationalism less as a *movement* – the property of the “marvellously talented young men” of *Phoenix* and the Caxton Press – than as a *project*, collective and dynamic. It is a project that involves readers, writers and their texts.

It is a project that demands higher literary standards and greater professionalism: the best he can say about those represented here is that they demonstrate “a very decent competence in the craft of modern short story writing” (*Speaking* 7). And its goal is a new literature that commands a new audience, perhaps even a new and better nation – the alternative New Zealand that, for Sargeson, would be forever symbolised by the lone “honeysuckle tree” (rewarewa) glimpsed high on a ridgetop above the Mamaku plateau, standing “not for New Zealand as it is, but ... as it might worthily have been” (*Once* 47–48).

To a greater extent than Curnow’s first anthology, *Speaking for Ourselves* is also a specific product of 1945. As Wevers reminds us, it was a year in which the questions raised by its title – who did the anthology speak for, of what and to whom? – had very particular resonances. There is nothing in the collection that could really be called a war story, although John Reece Cole’s “Blues in The Night” is nominally set in wartime Britain. Elsewhere, the war is a distant backdrop against which local after-shocks – especially the reshaping of relationships and social structures – reverberate. In this respect, *Speaking for Ourselves* has affinities with other local publications of the period (Wevers cites the *New Zealand Listener* and *Women’s Weekly*) which disclosed “various levels of anxiety produced by the war and New Zealand’s part in it, its effect on domestic life, particularly morals, and the alarming opening up of a small insular and relatively homogeneous society to foreign interventions, both collective and individual” (Wevers, “Speaking” 97–98).²⁰ Curiously, some of the same publications were also the forum for a vigorous debate about the condition and role of New Zealand fiction. As Wevers comments, “[in] the context of 1945, literary nationalism seems both a misplaced and a crucial concern, a tight little shell awash in [a] storm of unmanageable proportions, trying to preserve its sense of self in a world where nationalism has been an unimaginably destructive force” (98).

Thus, perhaps even more than the *Book of New Zealand Verse*, *Speaking for Ourselves* can be seen as an expression of literary nationalism precisely calibrated to its times – necessarily different times to the Depression era, whose hardships had compelled the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers to expose the hollowness of the colonial myth. In Sargeson’s anthology, war and its consequent upheavals in fact expose the limitations and dangers of the new nationalist anti-

²⁰ Wevers asserts such “mainstream journals” were partly filling a void created by the wartime closure of *Tomorrow*, the restrictions on other publications because of paper shortages, and the absence from New Zealand of influential publishers such as Denis Glover (“Speaking” 97).

myth. The war has forced another re-examination of the national sense of self: once again, it is open to negotiation. If, as James Belich has remarked, “[p]ostwar New Zealand was torn between two strong trends: a sense of irrevocable change ... and a desire to *restore* – to restore a past that, ideally at least, was more familiar and secure” (*Paradise* 297), *Speaking for Ourselves* is primarily a harbinger of the first. Despite its editor’s unassuming claims, it shares common ground with the post-colonial literary movement that was beginning to gain force as former colonies – propelled by a post-war “mood of national cultural assertion” and debt-ridden Britain’s wish to rid itself of its far-flung possessions – pursued independence (B. King 26).²¹ Across the world, Britain’s former subjects were finally emerging “like white shoots under the wet sack of Empire”, as A.R.D Fairburn’s “Dominion” (1938) had earlier foreseen (in Curnow, *BNZV* 1945 116).

If the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers had earlier been guilty of insularity, as their opponents alleged,²² then Sargeson’s anthology’s thorough-going engagement with the after-shocks of war and the new uncertainties of the post-colonial era suggests this is no longer the case in 1945. In his selections and in his own contribution, discussed below, Sargeson demonstrates a sense of belonging both here *and* there that is more sophisticated, and potentially more productive, than the anguished deracination of 1930s. Those now engaged in the project of building a national literature are not anxious isolationists retreating to some nationalist fortress but participants in what Belich calls a “transnational” culture, living (if not always comfortably) “in two hemispheres – and on two ‘brows’, high and low” (*Paradise* 341). They make take their inspiration from “the raw material of the local” but they are also “prompted and challenged by the full force of writing in English world-wide, as well as the pace of international events” (S. Murray, *Never a Soul* 13).

Speaking for Ourselves also provides a window into the personal and artistic dilemma in which Sargeson found himself in 1945. The sources and manifestations of this dilemma are discussed in detail in chapter 3 – his mixed feelings at having become “the exponent of a local tradition” (McCormick, *Letters and Art* 182); his frustrations with the constraints of the

²¹ From 1947, New Zealanders were able to call themselves New Zealand citizens for the first time, an important step in the gradual journey towards full legal independence from Britain, achieved through the Constitution Act 1986 (W. David McIntyre, “Self-government and independence: Towards a republic?”, *Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/self-government-and-independence/page-7>).

²² The dubious validity of this charge is discussed in 1.4 below.

deliberately meagre idiom, subject-matter and form he had exploited throughout the 1930s; his doubts about his mentoring role. His sense of being at an artistic turning point can be traced in “The Hole that Jack Dug” that closes the anthology. It signals his desire for new directions in its discursiveness, its wilful withholdings, its attention to the unreal and inexplicable that resides within the everyday ‘New Zealand scene’. Read in conjunction with the modernist-inflected stories contributed by Duggan, Harris, Gilbert and Texidor, “The Hole that Jack Dug” suggests that “speaking for ourselves” might sound somewhat different in post-war New Zealand. A local reality might be apprehended in other ways than critical realism; modernist strategies and techniques too might be deployed in the service of ‘New Zealandness’. Speaking specifically of the inclusion of Harris’s “The Papeye and the Molacca”, Wevers contends Sargeson is making “a provoking and political choice” that “reglosses ‘ourselves’ away from nationalism and towards a cultural field – modernism, and to some extent acknowledges the deeper currents by advocating one writing style or mode over another” (Wevers, “Speaking” 102). As *Phoenix* had shown in the 1930s, *Speaking for Ourselves* confirms the cultural conversations set in motion by the literary nationalists were as much about ubiquitous aesthetic and political ideas as they were about purely local matters of personal and collective identity.

1.3 The anti-anti-myth

By the end of the 1940s, the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers still dominated literary culture in New Zealand, both as producers and power-brokers. However, their supremacy would be increasingly challenged throughout the next decade, beginning with the 1951 Writers’ Conference. Held in Christchurch at the height of the Waterfront Strike that divided and nearly paralysed the nation, the conference too resembled a battleground at times. Inter-generational factions skirmished over literary issues both pragmatic and philosophical: state funding of authors, the state of literary criticism, the significance of Māori literature (the existence of which had been scarcely acknowledged before), and recent trends in poetry. James K. Baxter’s virtuosic address on this last topic was hailed as the highlight of a conference one attendee likened to “those primitive tribal ceremonies where people gathered together to shout, beat the air and hurl abuse and ashes over the heads of one another in order to dispel the accumulated tensions and illwill in the community” (Cole, “Conference” 224).

Conference participants included Sargeson, Curnow, Brasch and Glover, as well as other prominent figures associated with the *Phoenix-Caxton* group, such as Winston Rhodes and Blackwood Paul. But the old literary guard – Pat Lawlor, Alan Mulgan, G.H. Scholefield – was still very much in evidence. Some remained openly hostile to the *Phoenix-Caxton* writers, now in their forties and fifties, who had usurped them as the country’s literary gatekeepers. Lawlor, secretary of the State Literary Fund, gave an incendiary address lambasting *Landfall* for showing “no regard for spiritual values or for interest in home or family life”, applauding the government for engineering the closure of *Tomorrow*, and berating the sordidness and obscenity of some young local writers’ work (quoted in H. Murray, 121–122). Robert Chapman, reporting on the conference in *Landfall*, said he felt he had witnessed “the uncomprehending clash of two fully foreign systems of values” (“Conference” 225).

But a third ‘value system’ was also present. A number of younger writers took part, including a Wellington contingent comprising Louis Johnson, W.H. Oliver, Baxter and others. They made plain their frustrations with the *Phoenix-Caxton* group, while acknowledging a shared desire “to repudiate the moralizing structures of New Zealand’s very seed breed of puritan” (Oliver, 221). To them, their immediate elders seemed every bit as exclusive and prescriptive as the Mulgan-Marris-Schroder triumvirate had once seemed to the young men of the 1930s. And just as had happened two decades earlier, a younger generation now characterised their immediate predecessors as father-figures it was their duty to overthrow.²³ The Wellington writers had already launched an attack in the form of an experimental literary magazine *Arachne*,²⁴ where they proposed what was effectively an anti-anti-myth to counter the literary nationalists’ project:

We should explore, not obscure, the situation of a culture in which each writer and artist is NOT part of a continuous tradition but must deliberately select from the past those influences which seem necessary to him, must accept another master than the community. This situation is at present most easily grasped in the bareness of colonial societies. Perhaps the older countries are on the way to it. If this is so some sort of international context for *Arachne* becomes possible. (quoted in Evans, *History* 151)

²³ See Louis Johnson’s 1986 interview with Harry Ricketts (*Talking About Ourselves* 147–48).

²⁴ Its previous incarnations were *Broadsheet* (first published in 1947) and *Hilltop* (1949).

It was an assertion of literary independence – from the burdens of history, geography and nation that had weighed so heavily on the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers, as well as from the sneers and jeers of a hostile community. It was also a declaration of intent by a new generation of writers who unashamedly wanted to be internationalists. Their views were compellingly articulated in Baxter’s conference paper, where the poet’s eloquence and erudition concealed the subversiveness of an address that “sounded more deferential to his elders than in fact it was” (Simpson, “A Country” 133). Baxter focused on developments in poetry since 1945. He praised publications like *Arachne* for showcasing new voices that, unlike the establishment writers dominating the high-quality but conservative *Landfall*, drew more overtly on European and American models and showed no signs of “the schizophrenia of the New Zealander who cannot distinguish himself from his grandfather”. Theirs was the voice of a new generation that had “grown up in entire acceptance of [their] environment, truly inhabiting the country” and was making a “fresh start” (“Trends” 4).

Baxter’s conference address was effectively the opening salvo in what became a pitched battle between two generations of writers. The *Phoenix*-Caxton writers arrayed themselves like “bouncer[s] at the doorway” of New Zealand literature, blocking access to the upstarts who accused them of “tribal piety” (Evans, *History* 106; Baxter, “Aspects” 75). It also marked a decisive shift in the literary power base away from the South Island, specifically Christchurch, in favour of Wellington and Auckland, where Curnow had already relocated. Over the ensuing decades, the fissures exposed at the conference widened and the geographical divide became more pronounced. New Zealand literary life disintegrated into what Newton has dubbed the “culture wars of the 1950s and ’60s” (“Death-Throes” 96). One battleground was the *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* launched in Wellington in 1951. In the first issue, *Arachne* editor Erik Schwimmer again attacked the anti-myth Curnow and his peers had created.²⁵ He paraphrased it as a story of “a lonely island-desert, discovered by navigators and developed by baffled explorers” which was said to be New Zealand. But the story was “never widely believed in by New Zealanders”; their appreciation of “the internationalisation of culture” was far greater than the literary elite gave them credit for (Schwimmer 65–66). The next issue of the *Yearbook* was more conciliatory, with editor Louis Johnson acknowledging the debt the present generation owed their elders. Nonetheless,

²⁵ A Dutch immigrant and sometime poet, Schwimmer contributed to and edited several publications associated with Victoria University, including *Broadsheet*, *Hilltop* and *Arachne*. From 1954, he edited *Te Ao Hou*, a bilingual quarterly published by the Department of Maori Affairs.

times had changed. If the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers had asked “Who are we?”, their successors were more interested in answering the abstract and universal question, “Where are we going?” (Johnson 9–10). A similar challenge came from Kendrick Smithyman, who claimed in *A Way of Saying* (1965) that the question preoccupying writers now was not “What are we, as New Zealanders?” but “What am I?”. The romantic impulse had been rediscovered too, he said, as poets had “imagined other objects for their love than the hills and got their people off the high country and into bed” (19, 48).

Curnow hit back hard at the new generation and their alternative poetics. Apparently, they were no longer concerned with problems of isolation or national identity, he opined in 1964. However, their “depressingly derivative, manneristic, and spiritless” work revealed a fatal disconnection from their own place: they had fallen instead into the “baited trap of a spurious ‘internationalization of culture’” (“New Zealand Literature” 198; “NZPY Review” 108). Curnow saved a special barb for the unnamed “rather recent colonists” – presumably including Schwimmer – for whom the belief that “good literature is written in space in a condition of weightlessness” was merely a convenient excuse for their own “incapacity to grasp or express the reality that presses upon them” (“New Zealand Literature” 201). Their failure to apprehend local reality confirmed their failure as poets: “If a poet can’t know his country, which he has seen, what can he do about the universe, which he hasn’t?” (“Conversation” 254).

Curnow was not the only *Phoenix*-Caxton writer intent on preserving his generation’s values and legacy. As editor of *Landfall*, Charles Brasch did likewise, although less dogmatically. Bruce Harding argues that Brasch, New Zealand’s “secular literary rabbi”, was in fact uninterested in reductive nationalism: internationalist in outlook and exilic in temperament, he wanted *Landfall* to be part of a cultural tradition that reflected both “extrinsic and intrinsic” influences (75, 76). But this did not prevent the journal from developing an increasingly sanctified and static look. It published a limited range of writers, excluding those who refused to express what Evans calls “the silence and emptiness of the countryside and the tenuousness of European life on the land” (*History* 170). And Evans is not alone in suggesting that *Landfall* perpetuated the idea of literary nationalism as the dominant tradition long after many New Zealand writers – including some of the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers themselves – had in fact moved on to new ground.

If the authority of Curnow and other *Phoenix*-Caxton poets came under increasing attack throughout the 1950s, this was not the case for prose writers. In fact, their hegemony continued to be endorsed for some time. Robert Chapman's seminal essay "Fiction and the Social Pattern" (published in *Landfall* in 1953) called for fiction that exposed, and was capable of destroying, the stifling constraints of puritanism. The author must be an agent of social change as much as an artist, Chapman argued, employing narrative realism to reveal New Zealand to New Zealanders (94–98). Chapman's essay effectively validated Sargeson's stories of the 1930s and '40s as the model for young prose writers. His influence was already well-entrenched. Dennis McEldowney, looking back from 1965, said that for aspiring writers like himself, the Sargeson model "was the only possible kind of short story and his people the only true New Zealanders. This had not at all the emotional force of an *opinion*: it was something that *was*" (quoted in Rhodes, *Frank Sargeson* 168).

Ironically, Sargeson himself was decidedly more sceptical that the way forward for New Zealand fiction lay in his particular form of narrative realism or the idiom of inarticulacy he had pioneered. Even by the mid-1940s, he was seeking a way out of the dead-end he felt he had reached. Thus, says Heather Murray, "writers who went home from the [1951] Conference to begin their realistic exposés of society were already too late": for Sargeson, the time for such exposés had passed (127).²⁶ Other prose writers too had already rejected, or were dramatically expanding, the straitjacket of critical realism: Murray cites Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Helen Shaw, Janet Frame, Ronald Hugh Morrieson and David Ballantyne (127–128). Sargeson's protégé Maurice Duggan was travelling further and further from the idiom of realism. And as I show in Part Three, Greville Texidor was even in the early 1940s exploring the terrain beyond narrative realism too, stimulated by her association with Duggan and her own wide reading in European and English literatures.

²⁶ Patrick Evans argues that, like Sargeson, Curnow's work too was 'moving on' by the time of the Writers' Conference: "the irony of the Wellington group's attacks on him was that the man they were attacking was no longer there". Evans sees a steady evolution in Curnow's verse influenced by the American poet Wallace Stevens, whom Curnow admired: "Stevens authorised in Curnow a change of stance that made a poem not so much an exercise of ontological retrieval – something once so utterly urgent for the New Zealander – as a sort of puzzle" (*History* 174–75). C.K. Stead likewise emphasises Curnow's shift away from the public poetry of national themes he had written in the 1940s, though Stead characterises it somewhat differently. He notes Curnow's growing interest in bringing together "the two images of New Zealand – the impressive landscape and the unremarkable towns – which had hitherto existed separately in our poetry ... without falsification of either" ("Hulk" 251).

Yet despite evidence of individual inventiveness, scrupulous Sargesonian realism was to dominate New Zealand fiction, especially the short story, for several more decades.²⁷ Its supremacy was repeatedly inscribed in the pages of *Landfall* and in canonical anthologies and collections. In some anthologies, including some published quite recently, mid-century fiction is represented largely by Sargeson himself – usually a story from the 1930s or early '40s – and stories by a seemingly interchangeable cohort of writers he mentored, all written in the realist mode that was Sargeson's signature.²⁸ Often, his protégés are consistently represented by the same stories – Gaskell's "School Picnic" and "All Part of the Game", Finlayson's "The Totara Tree" and Gilbert's "Girl With Ambition" among them. This uniformity may be justified in the case of those whose short-lived publishing careers meant editors lacked a substantial and evolving body of work to choose from. However, as I go on to discuss in chapter 3.3, the anthologies' myopic representation of Sargeson is more questionable, fossilising him around 1945 and doing scant justice to his subsequent literary reinvention.

Over time, though, the pre-eminence of Sargesonian prose was inevitably challenged just as the hegemony of the *Phoenix*-Caxton poets had been. Sargeson was accused of fathering a tribe and a tradition that would come to dominate, and deplete, New Zealand fiction for decades. As discussed in Part Two, his 'sons' were regularly portrayed as talentless ventriloquists who had done little more than mimic their mentor's idiom, and the atmosphere and attitudes of his signature stories. And they had retarded New Zealand fiction by recycling representations of a Sargesonian New Zealand that had, even by the late 1940s and certainly by the 1950s, moved on. Writing of David Ballantyne's 1965 novel *The Cunninghams*, K.O.

²⁷ The stories in Vincent O'Sullivan's first collection *The Boy, the Bridge, the River* (1978), for example, have been described as quintessentially Sargesonian in their "colloquial language, small-town milieu, and combination of directness and unexplained depths" and taciturn male protagonists, even if such qualities are allied to some decidedly un-Sargesonian modernist manoeuvres (the negative epiphany, the discontinuous narrative and more) (Ricketts, "The O'Sullivan Way" 286–88).

²⁸ It must be pointed out that this is certainly not true of all anthologies published in the second half of the twentieth century and later. For example, Oxford University Press's definitive four-volume *New Zealand Short Stories* series – published each decade from the 1950s to the 1980s – consistently emphasised new work. From C.K. Stead (who edited the second volume in 1966) onwards, editors chose to exclude writers represented in earlier volumes if they "ha[ve] gone on writing short stories, but ... added nothing which seems a development in form or in substance" (Stead, *New Zealand Short Stories*, introduction n.p.). My comments here reflect, among others, Sargeson's *Speaking for Ourselves* (1945), Dan Davin's *Classic New Zealand Short Stories* (1953, and subsequently as the first volume in the OUP series), Phoebe Meikle's *Short Stories by New Zealanders* (1970), Marion McLeod and Bill Manhire's *Some Other Country* (1984), Vincent O'Sullivan's *Oxford Book of New Zealand Short Stories* (1992), and Michael Morrissey's *The Flamingo Anthology of New Zealand Short Stories* (2000).

Arvidson deemed it symptomatic of “a literature ... of deficiency” that could be traced back to Sargeson; it was “the end-point of a genre rather than a new means of exploration” (70). As late as 1985, Michael Morrissey could still accuse the Sargeson tradition of exerting a stranglehold over the short story form, investing it with what he called “the same beige moral tone ... the same dreary humanism ... the same truncated, banal dialogue occupying itself with similar issues, confrontations and characters” (*New Fiction* 16).

Thus, by the later decades of the twentieth century, it was clear that the concerns of the *Phoenix*-Caxton generation (although not necessarily their work) no longer resonated with many writers and readers. The older generation’s relentless preoccupations – with the Pākehā’s tenuous foothold on the land, with their elders’ allegiances to England, with the repressive forces of puritanism – struck a new generation as dated and irrelevant, as meaningless as “kicking [a] dried goose turd around the back yard” (Ian Wedde, quoted in Roberts, “Nationalism”).

1.4 Untold stories: new critical perspectives on the 1940s

In charting the birth and evolution of the literary nationalist project, I have shown how it became “our favourite [literary] historical narrative”, notwithstanding assaults on its power from the 1950s onwards. Several factors allowed it to retain this status for much of the twentieth century. Firstly, the project’s powerful founders and champions had, with the exception of Fairburn, unusually long and productive careers. Their longevity allowed them to continue preserving, privileging and embellishing the narrative of literary nationalism in essays, reviews, autobiographies, anthologies and the journals they edited (notably *Landfall*). Some university English departments lent their weight, promulgating the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers’ account of national literary invention as the authoritative version. Cumulatively, these factors helped keep the “nationalist frame” firmly in place as the principal way of reading and thinking about New Zealand literature.

More recently, though, literary scholars including Alex Calder, John Newton, Stuart Murray, Lydia Wevers, Leonard Bell, Kai Jensen, Simon During and Sarah Shieff have proposed different ways of seeing the literary landscape of the 1940s. Various, they have interrogated conventional readings of particular *Phoenix*-Caxton writers, shed new light on those working

outside the dominant nationalist frame, or called attention to various delinquencies and discordances that disrupt the era's apparent uniformity. Complementing their revisionist literary criticism has been the work of biographers such as Michael King and literary historians like Patrick Evans, who have presented new evidence profoundly altering our view of some of the era's key figures. Beyond literature, historians James Belich, Felicity Barnes, Giselle Byrnes, Tony Ballantyne and others have challenged the accepted version of New Zealand history as a "progressive and evolutionary development, from Polynesian homeland to colonial outpost to independent nation-state", driven by the pursuit of national identity and a belief in this country's "exceptionality" (Byrnes 1–2). They have complicated and disrupted this colony-to-nation narrative in various ways. Some have brought to light the "diversity of lived historical experiences" it excludes (Byrnes 7). Others investigate the different relationships and structures through which people have defined themselves beyond the nation; affinities of culture, gender, class, region and more. New Zealand's past has been redefined not as a discrete and isolated phenomenon but as one strand in a transnational narrative shared by multiple settler societies (Byrnes, Chapter 1) or in a web of larger global processes (T. Ballantyne 13).

Collectively, these new critical approaches reveal a range of untold stories about the 1940s and the literary nationalist project which has dominated our view of the era. A common theme is the proposition that, from its very inception, the nationalist project was neither as inward-looking as its opponents alleged, nor as revolutionary as its proponents claimed.

Overseasia

In the guise of Whim Wham, Allen Curnow wrote in 1954:

... Overseas Standards we can't neglect,
They're Something a Joker has got to respect;
And Overseas Practice is equally hard
For Jokers in General to disregard –
In our Arts and our Letters they give us the Norm,
Those Overseas Standards to which we conform.
("Overseasia", *Whim Wham* 101)

Curnow's satiric intent masks the accuracy of his observation about New Zealand's cultural landscape in the 1940s and '50s. Despite the nationalist writers' professed fidelity to the "local and special", New Zealand literature remained manifestly shaped by – perhaps even in thrall to – "overseas practice [and] standards", albeit more subtly than in earlier times.

The *Phoenix*-Caxton writers' lively engagement with international influences and developments, including those issuing from the tradition they claimed to be repudiating, has been amply demonstrated. Of *Phoenix* itself, Patrick Evans observes that it:

looked the way an Anglophile education said a modern literary journal should look. Far from representing a radical break with the past, *Phoenix* represents an attempt to find some kind of authenticity, to derive origin and continuity from the very cultural epicentre it is commonly supposed to have been trying to leave behind. (*History* 80–81)

Noel Waite argues that such obvious derivativeness was in fact intrinsic to a project whose remit was global as much as local. Writing specifically of the Caxton Press, whose publications shared *Phoenix*'s spare, modernist aesthetic, Waite observes:

[It] pitched its authors as literary pioneers, striking out to claim the nationalist high ground. In this attitude they were the epitome of the modernist myth of the avant-garde, as formulated by the European, but primarily English, models from which they derived their inspiration and their authority. This was a nationalist movement grounded here only by virtue of the heavy cast iron presses that resided at Caxton's Victoria Street premises. (Waite 24)

In other words, the nationalism of the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers was always consciously allied to a larger global enterprise that was both aesthetic and political. Their immediate goal was to build an authentic indigenous literature and an audience for it, but beyond that sat a bigger ambition: to establish a disruptive modernist avant-garde just as their counterparts in England were doing.²⁹ While their project was undeniably local in reach, its engine was an imported model of cultural dissent.

Their imaginative writing also discloses the extent to which the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers needed, and were nourished by, the English (and European) literary tradition in its widest sense. Within the pages of *Phoenix* itself, the diction, interests and political fervour of the Auden generation are found more often than ground-breaking demonstrations of indigenous

²⁹ Here, I refer not only to the English poets of the 1930s, but also to the design influences cited by Waite, including typographer Eric Gill and the Bodley Head (16, 21).

poetics. But the loathsome stain of Georgianism can be traced too, including in the work of nationalist poets who extravagantly decried it. Even Glover – who in 1937 railed against the “the false tradition of Georgian verse, false because it is conservative, respectable and lacking in lustiness” – was described by the poet Alistair Campbell as “a reluctant Georgian” (both quoted in L. Jones, *Picking Up the Traces* 54, 102).³⁰ While Curnow disavowed Georgian tendencies, he freely acknowledged the influence of Yeats,³¹ Pound, Eliot, the French symbolists, Rilke and Lorca on his early poetry, and of Wallace Stevens later (“Conversation” 264, 259). As Sargeson developed his signature narrative techniques, he found compelling models among American and Australian post-colonial writers – notably Sherwood Anderson, William Saroyan and Henry Lawson – but also saturated himself in English and European modernists as various as Joyce, Proust, Forster and Sartre.

Moreover, most *Phoenix-Caxton* writers regarded publication and critical acclaim in England as the highest confirmation of literary value, the only imprimatur that really mattered at home. Access to so sizeable a market was also, of course, an economic lifeline at a time when it was virtually impossible to make a living in New Zealand solely by writing. When Fairburn’s poems were published by Charles Lahr’s Blue Moon Press in London in the 1930s, he knew it would boost his commercial prospects and prestige back in New Zealand (Barnes 112, 117). Despite his ferocious commitment to local publishing and printing, Glover – introduced to London literary life while serving in the Royal Navy during the war – was proud that his wartime prose had been published first in John Lehmann’s *New Writing*, and that he had been chosen to design and print volumes of new post-war verse by two venerated British poets, Laurie Lee and Edith Sitwell (Ogilvie 138–139, 235). The enduring importance – financial and reputational – to Sargeson of his long and fruitful relationships with two stalwarts of the English publishing world, Lehmann and William Plomer, is described in Part Two.

Thus, as Stuart Murray asserts, certainly in the 1930s, “the national as it operated in New Zealand ... had, as one of its trajectories, a deep and vital connection to the orthodoxies of

³⁰ Campbell cited some of Glover’s best-known poems, including the ‘Harry’ sequence, as evidence: Glover himself conceded Campbell had “scored some bullseyes” (Ogilvie 354–55). More recently, in *The Long Forgetting*, Evans comments that in Glover’s lyricism, and especially his skilful manipulation of affect, we see a more accomplished deployment of the same poetic tools used by the unreconstructed Georgian poets of *Kowhai Gold* (128).

³¹ Especially “the idea of the national and public poet embodied in Yeats” (S. Murray, *Never a Soul* 40).

the English writing taking place at the same time” – orthodoxies that included modernism and leftist politics (*Never a Soul* 154). This connection is more visible in the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers’ creative output than in the doctrinaire pronouncements they made as critics and gatekeepers. But it is downplayed in their subsequent portrayal as the founding fathers of New Zealand literature: suggestions of second-hand influence did not sit well with that particular myth.

Phoenix’s political energies especially interest Murray, who argues that its specifically literary preoccupations have in fact been over-emphasised at the expense of its political and internationalist concerns. He argues that these concerns, particularly Mason’s Marxism, were “edited out of the nationalist narrative” because they did not fit the agendas of those constructing that particular story (*Never a Soul* 44). In fact, Murray claims, the literary and the political were indivisible strands in the cultural discourse *Phoenix* stimulated in the 1930s; they shared ideological common ground, were mutually influential and frequently converged. Bertram’s “national consciousness” and Mason’s “socialist culture” are, he says, barely distinguishable. Though the two editors may have been “work[ing] towards different Utopias”, both used their position to issue clarion calls for change and “the mechanics of the process share many points of interaction” (*Never a Soul* 44). Yet to myth-makers primarily intent on proving the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers had brought into existence an independent autonomous literature, the journal’s interest in international socialism, the global economic order and the fight against fascism – like its borrowings from the idiom of international modernism – was an inconvenient side-story.³²

Evans, Murray and Waite thus all find evidence of internationalism, conscious and unconscious, in the (purportedly) purely indigenous landscape of nationalism. Francis Pound does likewise in *The Invention of New Zealand* (2009), where he examines the role of the arts in creating a national identity from the 1930s onwards. But the connections he traces between international culture and the nationalist project veer into more troubling territory than a fondness for modernist aesthetics or socialism. Pound identifies a xenophobic, race-based undercurrent in the nationalist project that inexorably draws it – even if unwittingly – towards the “cultural biologism”³³ that had gained such a dangerous foothold in 1930s Europe. He

³² Even more so, though for different reasons, once disillusionment with the Soviet Union set in.

³³ “In the 1930s and 1940s, in New Zealand as in Europe, there was a pervasive topos of blood, sign of an omnipresent consciousness of race; and culture and race were constantly conflated. Everywhere there

hears echoes of the American regional realist artists, too, who condemned European modernism as “a Jewish and homosexual conspiracy” (Pound 80, 83). The New Zealand nationalists’ exaltation of the land as the wellspring of national identity and art – a place must be made for “our mountains and silent places” within “the framework of our lives”, as Monte Holcroft wrote (*Waiting* 76) – could be readily corrupted. From venerating the land, it was only a short step to venerating soil, blood and race; indeed, to the full-blown rhetoric of fascism. In the eyes of some in the cultural nationalist camp, Pound suggests:

[It] is in the land ... that one will find the true culture of New Zealand – not in the city, the place only of unreality in Nationalist discourse: the place of the woman, the foreigner ... the aesthete, the homosexual, and the Jew. (Pound 37)

Pound finds such sentiments in the paintings of Lois White, in Holcroft’s essays on New Zealand culture (scattered with “the spoor of an endless rhetoric of race”) and the writings of A.R.D. Fairburn. Not only did Fairburn once fantasise about staging a fascist coup, but he also complained that “Jewish standards have infected most Western art” (81). Such statements from the isolationist and xenophobic fringes of the cultural nationalist project could be justified on geographical grounds, says Pound, as if it were inevitable for an island nation “to refuse, or to lack, the foreign” (39). But if local nationalist rhetoric of the 1930s is sometimes disturbingly reminiscent of Nazi rhetoric, he believes this was largely accidental. In fact, only members of the local refugee community seemed to notice the resonances. Austrian modernist architect and émigré Ernst Plischke considered his New Zealand colleagues’ obsession with forging an indigenous national architecture “smells a bit of Blood and Soil”.³⁴ Elsewhere, he commented “I cannot forget how this word ‘indigenous’ has been misused by reactionaries all over the world” (quoted in Pound 84). And the German-born art historian Dr Gerda Eichbaum wrote in a 1944 *Art New Zealand* review: “Ever since Hitler has made ‘blood and soil’ his one and only creed, all tendencies pointing in this direction ... appear to have some sinister meaning, even if not intended by the author” (quoted in Pound 85). Eichbaum’s immediate target was the nostalgic European regionalist novel, exemplified by Richard Llewellyn’s *How Green Was My Valley* (1939). But she might also have had

was what we might call a *cultural biologism*. Culture was spoken of as if it were transmitted by blood, a matter of genetic inheritance” (Pound 79–80).

³⁴ “Blood and Soil” (“Blut und Boden”) was a fundamental Nazi concept positing an inviolable bond between the German people and the soil of their homeland. It found expression in Nazi-era films, novels and drama that idealised the rootedness of the German farmer in the countryside: such works were coined “Blubo”, an abbreviation of “Blut and Boden” (Grunberger 366–69).

Holcroft's ardent outpourings in mind. A year earlier, while decrying "the nationalist dogmas which have brought ruin and shame to European nations", he had nonetheless defended their underpinning idealism, using language that uncomfortably recalls the rhetoric of *Blut und Boden*:

Idealism, at its best, is an attempt to identify a racial soul with the processes of history, a consecration of soil and mind to the service of the spirit. ... New Zealanders are not likely to feel any sympathy with this somewhat exalted view of their cultural task. Yet if they are to make themselves a spiritual home they must find it in the way that their forefathers found it – in the affirmations of literature. (Holcroft, *Waiting* 42)

Origins and inventions

Another well-established assumption that scholars have challenged is the myth of creation surrounding the *Phoenix-Caxton* writers – a myth in which they, and they alone, were the architects of New Zealand's first truly indigenous literature. Evans reads the introduction to the *Book of New Zealand Verse* (1945) as evidence of Curnow's desire to "invent[t] a source of authority" for his programme of literary renewal (*History* 108). Needing ancestors to legitimise his project, Curnow anoints the eccentric romantic poet D'Arcy Cresswell and the much younger Mason (who had in fact all but stopped writing poetry by 1940) as founding fathers. According to Evans, Curnow then proceeds to over-represent and cherry-pick their work, choosing "the parts ... that sounded nationalistic" in an attempt to show "recent poetry as coming out of something else instead of having suddenly invented itself" (*History* 109, 107–108). Despite their manifold differences, Curnow yokes them firmly together as the first local poets to take their craft seriously and to write truthfully about "belonging to a new kind of country where the [English literary] tradition had no deep root in actual scene and people; to which the tradition could give little because there was yet no life of spirit to receive it" (*BNZV* 1945 28). Stuart Murray agrees that both Cresswell and Mason were misrepresented so Curnow could 'make a place' for them in the nationalist canon. In fact, Murray considers Cresswell is more properly located as part of "the flux of 1930s writing, where his positions and contradictions ... are paradigmatic of a decade of overlaps between Britain and New Zealand". As for Mason, the Marxist conviction that made his poetry increasingly

internationalist and militant (and, arguably, less successful³⁵) is largely invisible in Curnow's judicious selections, says Murray (*Never a Soul* 61, 71).

However fabricated and tenuous, the point of origin Curnow claimed for the literary nationalist project acquired the status of fact. "In a few agitated years," wrote E.H. McCormick of the 1930s, "a handful of men and women produced a body of work which, in an intimate and organic sense, belonged to the country as none of its previous writings had done" (*Survey* 108). These pioneers had not merely reinvigorated or even revolutionised New Zealand literature: they had actually *invented* it. As Francis Pound observes of this endlessly repeated creation myth: "It is a singular characteristic of the Nationalist period that its rhetoric remains and never stops being explicitly inaugural, that the litany of origin must never fall silent" (6). Nor did it. As late as 1999, Glover's biographer could write that Glover, Mason, Fairburn and Curnow were "entirely responsible for creating an indigenous New Zealand literature" (Ogilvie 77). When Curnow died in 2001, C.K. Stead paid reverential tribute to what he had inaugurated: "It was as if no one had quite seen New Zealand in the English language until Curnow saw it. He blessed it with a vision of itself and, in that, liberated others" ("Obituary").

But more recently, the "litany of origin" – with its implicit assumption that nothing that could be called 'New Zealand literature' existed before the 1930s – has been vigorously contested. As already discussed, some critics have done so by disputing the novelty or exclusive indigeneity of the *Phoenix-Caxton* writers' project. Others have advanced a case for earlier texts whose claims – as literature, and as bona fide *New Zealand* literature – have been unrecognised or forgotten. Thus Trixie Te Arama Menzies argues that, far from working in a vacuum when he compiled the *Book of New Zealand Verse*, Curnow was in fact building on the much-maligned *Kowhai Gold*. "A New Zealand poetic tradition did not spring fully armed out of Curnow's head in 1945", she asserts: he was in fact "continuing and shaping a considerable poetic tradition *already in existence*" (20, 26). In an essay in *A History of New Zealand Literature* (2016), Alex Calder advances a case for Jane Mander's *The Story of a New Zealand River* (1920) as a proto-nationalist text. While conceding the novel is more "minor but worthy" than "great", Calder nonetheless finds it significant for its provocative

³⁵ While Mason's political commitment has long been viewed as the death-knell of his poetry (see, for example, McCormick, *Survey* 117), Ricketts proposes that "the early fizzling out" of Mason's talent is simply an instance of an early blooming poet whose interests took him in other directions: "Politics, in other words, was a substitute for the poetry not its assassin" ("Mason, First?" 5).

blending of registers and modes. Deploying strategies that anticipate what Sargeson and others would do nearly twenty years later, Mander intermingles standard realism with febrile melodrama, careful documentation of the everyday with a “marked antipathy to social conventions” (“Defiance” 99). Meanwhile, Jane Stafford and Mark Williams find in the even earlier writing of Maoriland – in which a “pro-empire nationalism” is coupled to a nostalgic regard for a purportedly vanishing Māori world (*Anthology* 3, 100) – another foreshadowing of the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers’ project. Maoriland writers too registered the inadequacy of imported literary conventions and they too experienced the supposedly ‘modern’ sense of fragmentation occasioned when once-coherent “signs and things” have “unavoidably ... spun apart”, Stafford and Williams argue; indeed, they assert, “[t]he colonial world was an ideal one in which to encounter modernity” (*Maoriland* 16–17). While Curnow saw in the work of Jessie Mackay, one of Maoriland’s leading poets, “only the familiar pseudo-nationalism of the colony” (*PBNZV* 1960 32), Stafford and Williams consider Mackay and her contemporaries representatives of “the first generation of cultural nationalism.” These writers find “ways of dealing with displacement, not avoiding it”, including by incorporating Māori material, in order “to shape a locally marked literature” (*Maoriland* 14).

Evans’s *The Long Forgetting* (2007) likewise refuses to see the cultural nationalism of the 1930s and ’40s as a new dawn, but as a continuity of attitudes and preoccupations in evidence since the earliest days of European settlement. He identifies a strain of “affective indigenisation” in the work of the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers – a deep, emotional, regretful yearning for a pre-lapsarian world destroyed by colonial capitalism. It is a yearning that is as old as the colonial project itself, a burden borne by all who participate in it and who inherit both its achievements and depredations. The dispossessors are now dispossessed, evincing a sensibility Evans calls a desire to “becom[e] Māori” (*Long Forgetting* 128). He traces it through Glover’s “Sings Harry” sequence (1953), Fairburn’s *Dominion* (1938) and the 1945 *Book of New Zealand Verse*, where Curnow’s inclusion of Cresswell, Bethell and Wall – all “unreformed” Christchurch nature poets – makes the anthology “look far less an interruption than it is supposed to have been, and far more profoundly connected with fundamental issues of white settlement, particularly with the ongoing tension between Utopia and Arcadia” (*Long Forgetting* 130).³⁶ When, in his memoirs, Sargeson describes the farm and way of life

³⁶ The clash between Arcadian and Utopian visions of New Zealand is, Evans considers, central to the history of European settlement in New Zealand and to its literature (*Forgetting* 115). He draws on James Belich’s distinction between Arcadianism (which involved “native natural abundance and

of his Adamic uncle Oakley as an image of “New Zealand as it might worthily have been” (*Once* 47–48), Evans argues Sargeson is

speaking through and beyond the immediate requirements of the cultural nationalism of which he seemed to be such a central part, and expressing the *real* continuity of the larger culture – a nostalgic undertow from the beginnings of European settlement that continues in various forms today. Like Glover’s Harry, the ‘Sargeson’ of *Sargeson* has become a victim, has been dispossessed – has ‘become Māori’, with a typical expression of affect. (Evans, *Long Forgetting* 129)

Continuities between the literary nationalist project and the wider narrative of European settlement have also been asserted by Dale Benson (see also chapter 9). Her thesis “A World Like This” (2000) identifies a distinctly existentialist sensibility not only in literary nationalist fiction of the 1930s and ’40s (she analyses texts by Mulgan, Sargeson, and Davin, among others) but also late nineteenth-century works such as Chamier’s *Philosopher Dick* and Satchell’s *The Greenstone Door*. Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon*, in which the narrator records a “dreadful doubt as to my own identity – as to the continuity of my past and present existence” (65), is an unexpected omission from Benson’s analysis. The two groups of writers reveal a shared concern for what she considers existentialism’s central preoccupation – the self-conscious individual – but engage with it in distinctive ways. While the later writers are self-aware participants in what had become a popular international literary movement associated with Sartre and Camus, their nineteenth-century counterparts were “pre-existentialists”, whose doubts and anxieties were rooted in the religious uncertainties and new scientific discoveries of the Victorian era. Moreover, while the nineteenth-century writers accept the fundamentals of the Myth of Progress (if people fail to adapt to the new environment, it is down to personal shortcomings rather than the folly of the colonial project, let alone the folly of humankind), the existentialists of the later era insist that failure is inevitable and symptomatic of the human condition (Benson 2–3). Nonetheless, Benson finds compelling continuities, particularly in the recurrent fictional trope of Men Alone found in both nineteenth century and mid-twentieth century texts – individuals acutely aware of their isolation in an alien environment, estranged from a community that has scarcely begun but from which something important has already been lost. Benson’s existentialists and proto-existentialists are Evans’s dispossessed, registering the absence of connectedness and

steady, natural, farm-led growth powered by virtuous individuals”) and Utopianism – a different kind of abundance, the “fast, artificial town-led growth powered by progressive collectivities” arising from the “insemination” and exploitation of this natural world by the British (Belich, *Making Peoples* 306).

meaning in a place where, for all the triumphalist colonial back-slapping, they know Europeans are, at best, temporarily encamped.

Another line of critical inquiry has been followed by Newton, Leggott, Jensen, Stafford and others. Their concern is not simply with the myth of origin the literary nationalists manufactured to support their project, but with the “other possibilities [that] were bulldozed in the process” (Newton, “Identity” n.p.). The *Phoenix*-Caxton writers’ myth-making allowed them to deny or discard a range of inconvenient literary legacies: the forgotten Māori records of first encounters, the writing of the early colonists and visitors like Samuel Butler, the literature of Maoriland. In particular, they were able to jettison the work of women writers such as Robin Hyde and Eileen Duggan – riddled with “sentimental posturing” and “emotional cliché”, according to Curnow (*BNZV 1945* 24–25) – and anything else that disrupted the aggressively masculine aesthetic associated with the nationalist project. Committed to rediscovering some of what she calls these “previous competences”, Michele Leggott goes in search of a “lost matrix of women poets”, re-reading their work in the conviction that “these women have something to say that I need to hear” (266, 269). Kai Jensen, in *Whole Men* (1996), sheds light on other manifestations of individuality and difference occluded by the nationalists’ masculinism. Discussing Sargeson’s treatment of homosexual love – deeply coded at first, but increasingly explicit in his later work – Jensen contends that Sargeson’s “elaborate strategies both to conceal and reveal his sexuality” are not only at the core of his fiction but, because of his iconic status as a nationalist writer, serve to complicate the fundamentally masculine identity that sits at the heart of the nationalist project (125, 170).³⁷ To Newton, Sargeson’s self-censorship is confirmation (if any were needed) of the “homophobic disposition of the nationalist project” that his stories both express and resist, yet another of the era’s untold narratives (“Homophobia” 101).

The plight of the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers described by Evans and Benson – unsettled, dispossessed, yearning for indigeneity – has been examined through a post-colonial lens. Newton, Hugh Roberts, Alex Calder and others have characterised the literary nationalist project as less a heroic challenge to the ascendant colonial myth than an unacknowledged stage in its fulfilment. In “Identity in the Future Anterior” (2001), Newton examines the implications of the nationalists’ dismissal of the literary past. When, looking back at the

³⁷ And, as Patrick Evans reminds us, masculinism is also central to the modernist tradition that informs that project (*Long Forgetting* 145).

colonial era, Curnow pronounced “a New Zealander can find nothing upon which a continuity of tradition might be established” (*PBNZV 1960* 29), he thereby reiterates the very historical narrative he claims to be rejecting, says Newton. Curnow’s rebuff is little more than another re-telling of the colony-to-nation story in which culture progresses along an “ascending gradient”, the failures of one generation being corrected by the next (“Identity” n.p.). In “Colonialism above the Snowline” (1999), Newton calls for more critical attention to “the ways in which mid-century Pakeha nationalism consummates, as much as it contests, the colonialist enterprise” (“Colonialism” 85). He excoriates the predominantly South Island nationalist writers for transforming an idea about their region’s particular geography (unpopulated, frozen, forbidding) and history (a relatively small Māori population was very rapidly overwhelmed by European settlement) into a totalising national myth. Not only did they thereby “freez[e] out the Tangata Whenua”, but they also “shut down other settler idioms which inhabited that landscape differently” (“Colonialism” 94) – those other idioms including the romantic, the mystical, the voices of women and anyone at odds with the “secular temper of a modernist-inflected nationalism” (“Colonialism” 89). In claiming to have invented “a culture ... out of nothing”, the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers not only deny their ongoing complicity in the colonialist enterprise but also their affiliations with earlier writers alongside whom they are constructing “a dominant settler imaginary” (“Colonialism” 89, 85).

Hugh Roberts’s essay “The Same People Living in Different Places” (1999) is framed partly as an argument with Newton’s assertion that the nationalists’ programme was predicated on a parochial “myth of an aboriginal void”, and used to justify a civilizing “project of settlement” in which specific peoples were to be swept aside (“Colonialism” 92). Roberts contends that Curnow and his contemporaries did not in fact conceptualise a “*terra nullius* in which *pakeha* males are to engage in the pleasures of nation building” (“Same” 230). He points to the crucial timing of Curnow’s first anthology: it appeared soon after the intensive national self-scrutiny occasioned by the 1940 Centennial in which, following decades of neglect, the Treaty of Waitangi’s importance to the nation’s identity had been re-asserted. For Europeans raised on the comforting colony-to-nation story, including the literary nationalists, a resurrected Treaty raised uncomfortable questions, says Roberts. If pre-colonial New Zealand was no *terra nullius*, no “blank slate on which hardy colonials [had written] a national history”, what had the Europeans been doing there (“Same” 232)? Whereas the first wave of literary nationalists could write from a position of untroubled “colonial confidence” in the 1890s, their mid-century counterparts found themselves repeatedly inscribing “the guilt of

dispossession". Theirs was an existentialist dilemma with both literary and political dimensions, argues Roberts:

The Treaty of Waitangi, then, leaves the *pakeha* nationalists of the 1930s and 40s no place from which to speak that is neither Maori nor British. ... The emptied landscape is not a space waiting to be appropriated, or an arena for an elemental dialogue with the Gods, but a projection of an intractable problem of representation: no habitable space for a national New Zealand identity can be imagined. ("Same" 234)

Roberts thus reads Curnow's anthology partly as "an announcement of the impossibility of national identity". Along with other literature of the period, it confirms that "the 'psychic wound' of the past is the occasion for the very writing that hopes to erase it" – this is, he claims, how national literary histories are made ("Same" 234, 237).

In "Unsettling Settlement" (1998), Calder also sheds light on the often-overlooked continuities between the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers and their antecedents. Like others, he points to the nationalists' rather ineffectual attempts to separate themselves from past "colonial literaturishness", in Curnow's phrase. The appearance on the snowline of a band of Oreads in Brasch's "The Silent Land" (1945) "duplicate[s] all those earlier moments in colonial history where a European name displaces not just an existing Maori name, but that complex, richly textured oral grid through which the land is always already known" ("Unsettling Settlement" 172). Displacement of a different kind is revealed in Curnow's decision to incorporate – but immediately ringfence – translated Māori material in his 1960 anthology. Its heavily qualified inclusion presents Māori literature "not [as] a living component so much as a separate wing in the national museum, curated by Pakeha, who may be embarrassed by their colonial ancestors, but who resemble them in the vigor with which they blow dust from treasures from the past" ("Unsettling Settlement" 174).

As well as looking back for literary connections, Calder also finds connections between the nationalists and later literary developments. In the late twentieth century, the nationalist phase is said to be over and "we are now free ... to write less insistently as New Zealanders and more confidently as writers whose cosmopolitan affiliations ... compound any simple identification of self with nation" (166). But ideas of identity and nation are still exerting pressure on imaginative writing and on the making of anthologies, he argues. The editorial stance of the 1985 *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* may be overtly anti-nationalist, but it is also resolutely localist – positions it is ultimately difficult to distinguish between. Like Curnow, the anthology's editors Ian Wedde and Harvey McQueen clearly understand

location “not just in terms of place, but as a nexus of relations – historical, cultural, geo-political”; however unfashionable, “nation” remains part and parcel of how people define their relationship with the place they live in (“Unsettling Settlement” 175). However, both Wedde and McQueen, and the editors of *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (Oxford, 1997), clearly prefer inclusiveness over the “hard frost” of Curnow’s editorial approach (Brasch, *Indirections* 391), presumably in an effort to accommodate the nation’s (by now officially-endorsed) bicultural and multicultural identities. Calder considers this approach risks a “woolly pluralism” (“Unsettling Settlement” 178), but it also demonstrates that the invention of New Zealand, claimed by the cultural nationalists as their defining mission, is an ongoing process rather than a finite act accomplished in the middle of the twentieth century:

we could say it takes any number of generations to ‘invent’ New Zealand, because invention is always a form of renovation, always ... a matter of adjusting familiar national identities in the light of ‘something different, something nobody counted on’. (“Unsettling Settlement” 166)

Literary commuters

Some of the most rewarding new ways of seeing the literary landscape of the 1930s and ’40s have been proposed by general historians. Instead of an anxious or inward-looking era, they describe a period in which new patterns of cultural traffic and transnational connections are becoming established across time and space.

In this more fluid world, the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers are imagined as early literary commuters, actively engaged in redefining and renegotiating New Zealand’s relationships with European culture (even if opportunities for actual travel remained scarce). Unlike earlier generations, they found they need not choose between the old binary opposites: home or exile, old world or new, here or there. They could, and did, participate actively in what historian Felicity Barnes calls “a cultural life that overflowed national borders” (97), regularly networking with writers, publishers and critics well beyond this country. They could be mobile, confident, cosmopolitan, equipped to visit the Old World not with a sense of inferiority or envy but “as returning shareholders” with something to offer. Indeed, some considered New Zealand literature not merely a robust branch line of the English tradition, but its potential saviour – according to Stuart Murray, Fairburn and others were convinced that “the virtue of writing in New Zealand was that it could regenerate writing in Britain” (*Never a Soul* 40). Buoyed by an increasingly transnational outlook, the cultural cringe was

no longer the default position when New Zealand writers visited Britain. As Belich remarks, some clearly believed that “if anyone could beat the Old British at their own games – even the subtle games of Bloomsbury ... it would be Better Britons” (*Paradise* 345).

The metropolis-colony relationship depicted by Belich and Barnes³⁸ is radically different from the traditional view in which the modern, sophisticated centre (Britain) is set against the wilderness of the provincial periphery (New Zealand). To Barnes, the recolonisation process allowed New Zealand to function as a virtual hinterland of London – which, in turn, became New Zealanders’ cultural capital, giving them access to the metropolitan sophistication their own country lacked. Importantly, she describes the cultural relationship between New Zealanders and London as a positive and reciprocal one, if not necessarily equal (9–10). The “London lives” of some New Zealand writers in the 1930s – Barnes mentions Ngaio Marsh, Jane Mander and Hector Bolitho, but also the staunchly nationalist Fairburn – “redraw the relationship between the two places as integrated and productive, which is at odds with nationalist narratives, where expatriation is a barrier to the development of an authentic cultural voice” (117–118). Indeed, for Fairburn, the experience was an invitation to rethink what it meant to be at home. He wrote to Mason in 1930 that “I don’t feel nearly as remote from home now as I have done before on occasions when I have been out of Auckland”. Later, he told him: “you can’t imagine how one comes, over here, to think of oneself ... as part of a nation, a part of its history” (Barnes 119). Thus, far from visiting the Old World “as ventriloquists of a culture that did not belong to them,” argues Barnes, temporarily expatriated writers such as Fairburn “were active participants in this culture they felt was theirs too” (121) – a feeling that remained with them once they returned, withstanding even the “hard frost” of the nationalist project (Brasch, *Indirections* 391).

Fairburn may have felt himself part of the British nation, and Ngaio Marsh may have exulted in “the sense of belonging to, and being carried high, on the full tide of London” (quoted in Barnes 119), but not all temporarily expatriated writers had the liberating transnational experience Barnes describes. Sargeson’s travels in Europe produced a loneliness and lack of connection he had never felt even “in the remote centre of the country most remote from where I was” (*Once* 110). Sargeson’s response also suggests that New Zealand writers

³⁸ And also, albeit referring to an earlier phase of the colonial project, by Tony Ballantyne. In *Webs of Empire* he argues for “a messier and more dynamic” understanding of imperial processes wherein “a set of shifting linkages ... were constantly remade as the relationship between colonies, as well as between Britain and its colonies, shifted” (15).

‘connected’ more readily with familiar British culture in which they had a stake, linguistically at least, than with European cultures from which he for one felt decisively alienated. As Barnes points out, Sargeson fled Europe for the familiarity of Britain, not New Zealand: London became his bolthole, where he could immerse himself in study in the British Museum library (120). Fairburn had a similar experience, cutting short a morale-sapping walking trip in France and Spain to return to London.

Nonetheless Barnes’s reinterpretation of the relationship between 1930s New Zealand writers and the Old World – confident, fluid, reciprocal – is attractive. Moreover, by positioning nationalist writers within a “continuous culture” that spans the Old World and the New, she opens up a space within which to consider what Newton calls cultural nationalism’s “most pressing untold story” (“Allen Curnow” 28) – the coming-together of local writers with exilic and refugee artists from war-torn Europe. This too disrupted the established patterns of intellectual and cultural traffic between New Zealand and the Old World. For years, the traffic had been largely one way: now, the sophisticated metropolis was coming to the hinterland.

1.5 Contrapuntal narratives: the exilic and the nationalist

Nationalist and exilic sensibilities are sometimes imagined as “conflicting poles of feeling” – politically- and aesthetically-charged categories that delineate the community from the individual, winners from losers, insiders from outsiders, unifying tradition from fragmented modernity (Brennan 60–61). Like Timothy Brennan, Edward Said also characterises the nationalist and the exilic as dialectical opposites, but, crucially, he asserts their necessary inter-dependence: each “inform[s] and constitute[s] each other”, he writes, and each arises out of a “condition of estrangement” (176).

According to Brennan’s more confrontational paradigm, the wartime encounter between the European exiles and the passionate architects of indigenous culture could have been an occasion for mutual suspicion, misunderstanding and cultural segregation. Surely the new arrivals, with their baggage of Old World artistic traditions and values, embodied all that New Zealand’s cultural nationalists wanted to free themselves from? In fact, as this section sets out, the nationalist and the exilic operated as strangely compatible mentalities in wartime

New Zealand, and can be seen converging, intersecting and projecting themselves onto each other in sometimes unexpected ways.

In the following discussion, the term ‘exile’ (and occasionally *émigré*) is used as a deliberately loose, catch-all description for all those who left other countries to seek safety or respite in New Zealand during the Second World War. They were a far from homogenous group. Some arrived before or during the war, and others immediately after. Some came from continental Europe, some from Britain or elsewhere. Some sought a permanent home while, for others, New Zealand was simply a staging post in a lifetime of itinerancy. Many were refugees from Hitler’s Europe: by the time the war began, the New Zealand government had accepted 1100, with considerable hesitation and reservations.³⁹ More refugees trickled in throughout the war, and another wave – including more than 4,000 ‘displaced persons’ made homeless and sometimes stateless by the conflict – arrived in its immediate aftermath. The pre-war arrivals came chiefly from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Many were German-speaking and most were Jews, predominantly secular (Bell and Morrow 18).

But wartime New Zealand was also a refuge for others whose origins, nationalities and migrant status cannot be readily classified; wanderers and travellers who, by choice or circumstances, washed up in New Zealand as the world was engulfed by war. The Dutch artist Theo Schoon, born in Indonesia, arrived from Java having fled the advancing Japanese army (Dunn 69); another exile from Java was the Hungarian-born concert pianist Lili Kraus, who had been imprisoned there (Shieff, “Nathan’s Kin” 45). Anna Kavan, a writer whose self-invented name belies her English home-county origins, came here by way of Sweden, California, Bali and New York with her lover Ian Hamilton, a British-born conscientious objector who owned land in Hawke’s Bay and settled here permanently after the war (J. Sturm 18–43). And of course there was the nomadic Englishwoman Greville Texidor; recently released from internment in Britain, she was a veteran of the recent Spanish Civil War and married to a non-Jewish German. Peripatetic, nebulously tied to their countries of origin, often eager to move on, these exotic itinerants were nonetheless absorbed into the refugee milieu and treated as *de facto* ‘European’ refugees by many New Zealanders. Sargeson, for example, apparently drew no distinction between Texidor and the genuinely

³⁹ And, in a pattern repeated in many countries, thousands more had been turned away.

European refugees he knew, such as Odo Strewe⁴⁰ or the “incredibly handsome Jewess” who lived in a nearby motor camp and often visited his bach.⁴¹ After first encountering Texidor and her husband Werner Droescher in 1941, Sargeson told his friend E.P. Dawson he was “meeting more and more refugees”.⁴² Tellingly, it was as his circle of refugee friends was widening that Sargeson wrote “The Making of a New Zealander” (1940), which traces a fleeting encounter between Nick, the alienated European in exile, and a colonial narrator who has not yet fully grasped what Curnow would call “the intimacy of the land we inhabit” (*PBNZV* 1960 51).

While their origins and circumstances were diverse, the wartime exiles shared some important experiences. Most of the Jewish refugees interviewed by Ann Beaglehole came from major central or eastern European cities, where cafés, restaurants, concerts, exhibitions, a sophisticated press, and intellectual debate were part of daily life. They tended to be highly-educated, and included a disproportionate number of professionals, business-people and scholars. A few were full-time artists, musicians and writers, but many more were gifted amateurs or “had participated as audience in the intellectual and cultural life of their communities”. In general, they embodied what George Steiner has called the “moral, intellectual and artistic noon of bourgeois Europe” (quoted in Beaglehole, *A Small Price* 143) – although “bourgeois Europe” would likely have been discomfited by the radical politics of those such as Droescher and Strewe.

Given this background, it is unsurprisingly that most exiles settled in New Zealand’s four main centres, particularly Wellington and Auckland. Even those who found work in small towns or on farms (including those required to do so by anti-alien legislation) tended to gravitate back to the urban centres. City living offered more opportunities, but also inescapably confirmed the vast differences between their new home and the world they had left behind. To many of Ann Beaglehole’s interviewees, New Zealand cities and towns seemed primitive, ugly and mean; there were few places to eat out at night and cultural

⁴⁰ Strewe, a Shanghai-born German of left-wing political persuasions, met Sargeson at an Auckland beach soon after arriving in New Zealand in 1938. Strewe had already been ostracised by his “xenophobic” North Shore neighbours, and would be interned on Somes Island throughout the war. Abandoning his early literary aspirations for landscape gardening, he remained a lifelong friend of Sargeson who insisted on drawing public attention to the long legs and other commendable physical attributes of this “tall, slim, blond Prussian” (Strewe 226).

⁴¹ Sargeson to Plomer, 1 December 1946. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-186. ATL.

⁴² Sargeson to Dawson, 16 July 1941. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/001. HC.

activities were limited largely to the movies. They were astounded by New Zealanders' attitudes to alcohol, and by displays of public drunkenness. Typical houses, even middle-class ones, struck them as poorly-planned, cold and awash in ugly Victoriana. The abundance of corrugated iron was astonishing. Social behaviours – the separation of men and women at parties and dances, the reluctance to display affection in public – puzzled and sometimes shocked them (Beaglehole, *A Small Price* ch 3).

Despite the uncongenial urban and social environment, many exiles nonetheless embraced their new lives. They relished the chance to start anew in a place that seemed fresh, innocent, unencumbered by class consciousness and ancient animosities. They met New Zealanders who were kind and generous, even if profoundly ignorant of where their new neighbours had come from and why. Certainly, they had been uprooted, traumatised, dispossessed – “without exception, mutilated”, in Theodor Adorno's unremitting account of exile (33) – but many refused to accept alienation as a permanent condition. They had, after all, survived, when countless others had perished. As historian Peter Munz remarked, “Not to be able to go to the opera in the evening was a small price to pay for being safe” (Beaglehole, *A Small Price* 43).

However, even the most optimistic exile could be made to feel decidedly unwanted. Official policy was to make them into “new Britishers: by procreation, and by assimilation; by making suitable aliens into vectors of the British way of life that still has so much to give to the world” (Lochore 89). Even those willing to assimilate remained highly conspicuous in monocultural, monochrome wartime New Zealand. According to the (later controversial) immigration official Reuel Lochore, some

revel in displays of emotionalism and self-pity, and fail to realize how we despise such lack of self-control. [...] On social occasions, and other occasions too, they talk loudly and untiringly about their own affairs. Being bad listeners they cannot take a hint, nor sense an attitude from what we prefer to leave unsaid. (87)⁴³

⁴³ Lochore wrote *From Europe to New Zealand – An Account of our Continental European Settlers* (1951), which I quote from here, when he was no longer a government official. However, official endorsement is implied by an introduction from the Secretary for Internal Affairs; he welcomes Lochore's analysis and views, while “certainly provocative”, as an addition to the post-war immigration debate. Lochore has since been condemned for his rampantly Anglocentric views and use of rhetoric that can only be called racist and anti-Semitic by contemporary standards. In his 1990 autobiography, businessman and former refugee Fred Turnovsky condemned Lochore and his previously unknown links with pre-war Nazi Germany (*Turnovsky: Fifty Years in New Zealand*, pp 89–95). However Michael King considered Lochore's opinions “more silly than sinister” (quoted by Paul

The exiles' visible differences were magnified by the community's wartime anxieties, and their alien status was confirmed by official decree. Some, like Strewe, were interned and many more harassed.⁴⁴ Others – including Texidor, by virtue of her marriage to a German – had their movements restricted, their correspondence monitored and their freedoms curbed by official measures ranging from the petty to the intrusive (Taylor 866–875). Even well-educated and supposedly liberal New Zealanders could turn on the outsiders in their midst. The head of Canterbury University's Philosophy Department allegedly reported scholar Karl Popper to the police as a Nazi spy (Morris 141), while Gertrud and Joachim Kahn's neighbours accused them of choosing a hillside site for their new home – celebrated in Curnow's poem – with the express intention of spying (Tyler 37). Suspicion of foreigners sometimes went hand-in-hand with anti-Semitism which, again, could come from any quarter. Fairburn, a loyal admirer and friend of the exiled German-Jewish poet Karl Wolfskehl, was also a devoted follower of the anti-usury Social Credit movement and given to anti-Semitic outbursts. Sargeson was well-known for his anti-fascist sympathies, but objected bitterly when his builder George Haydn billed him for an allegedly unauthorised bathroom alteration, saying: "You did it because you are a Jew and want to make more profit from me!" Sargeson eventually apologised, describing Haydn as "a better Christian than I am" (Lay and Stratford 45).⁴⁵

Exilic artists

The demographic impact of the wartime exiles was not large. Post-war New Zealand remained "one of the most ethnically homogenous of all European settler societies": it looked British, sounded British (at least on official occasions) and regarded itself as British (Carlyon and Morrow 29).⁴⁶ Little, it seemed, had changed since 1934 when Fairburn wrote on behalf of his countrymen, "we are Englishmen, born in exile" ("Aspects" 213).

Spoonley, in Bell and Morrow 231). Lochore later helped establish the Security Intelligence Service and was New Zealand's first ambassador to Germany.

⁴⁴ Initially, internment was restricted to people known to actively support Nazism or Fascism but the policy was later widened to include aliens whose loyalty or character was considered questionable (Taylor 853–54; Beaglehole, "Jewish Internees").

⁴⁵ This may have been the incident Vincent O'Sullivan refers to in his account of the "meaner" Sargeson that shadows the pages of Michael King's biography: O'Sullivan says E.H. McCormick broke off his friendship with Sargeson "because of [his] open offensiveness to a Jew" (O'Sullivan 4).

⁴⁶ Even though it was recognised that larger-scale immigration would be essential for New Zealand's post-war economic progress, Britain remained by far the largest source of migrants. At the beginning of

But over the past two decades, a number of scholars have drawn attention to the transformative impact of the exilic community, arguing that it helped reshape New Zealand's post-war economic, social and intellectual landscape to an extent that belies its size. The achievements and contributions of specific individuals have been well-documented by James Bade, Leonard Bell, Paul Morris, Diana Morrow, John Newton, Francis Pound, J.M. Thomson, Sarah Shieff, Linda Tyler, Friedrich Voit, Nelson Wattie and others. Listing even a handful of the subjects of their research produces a rollcall of luminaries – academics Karl Popper, Wolfgang Rosenberg and Paul Hoffmann; businessmen and arts patrons Fred Turnovsky and Denis Adams; jurist Sir Thomas Eichelbaum; musicians Georg Tintner and Lili Kraus, both short-term residents who nonetheless retained strong links with New Zealand; iconoclast physician, global anti-nuclear campaigner and scourge of the medical establishment Erich Geiringer; architects Heinrich Kulka and Ernst Plischke.

It is in the arts that the wartime exiles made perhaps their most visible contribution, individually and as a collective force. Exilic artists added a new and vitalising strand to the cultural fabric that, in the 1930s and '40s – and despite the best efforts of the nationalists – remained moribund, amateurish and heavily Anglophile. They injected fresh talent, drew on non-Anglophone traditions and introduced new artistic practices. Crucially, they brought to New Zealand a set of cultural sensibilities that were utterly unfamiliar: an assured conviction of the value of 'high culture' and intellectual life, a sophisticated view of the relationship between artist and society, and an understanding of the creative and formal possibilities offered by European modernism.

Their catalysing influence is perhaps most evident in the visual arts, even though, as Leonard Bell argues, their work has been sometimes neglected. The messianic zeal of some mid-century nationalist artists – Colin McCahon, for example, declared his art would show New Zealanders "something ... belonging to the land and not yet to its people", and "invent the way to see" this inchoate local reality (McCahon 364) – left little room for outsiders.⁴⁷ But in numerous scholarly studies and exhibition catalogues, Bell has rehabilitated under-appreciated exilic artists and shown how the talent and skills they introduced – as well as an

the 1950s, more than 85 percent of the foreign-born population still came from Britain or Australia (Phillips n.p.).

⁴⁷ The exclusiveness with which some mid-century visual artists conceived the nationalist project is perhaps most openly expressed in Tosswill Woollaston's edict that only those "who happen to be born in this country and ... no one else" could create New Zealand art (Pound 74).

unmistakeable exilic sensibility that permeates their work – opened up new creative and technical possibilities to local artists. In “Border Crossings”, he shows how photographers Frank Hofmann (who, with his wife Helen Shaw, founded the radical periodical *Here and Now* in 1949) and Irene Koppel (noted for her architectural and street photography) both exposed local practitioners to the principles of ‘New Photography’ and helped transform a hitherto conventional and utilitarian art form (71–76). The paintings of Austrian Frank Gross, who became part of The Group in Christchurch, bore the imprint of Cubism and expressionism in their treatment of unfamiliar urban and industrial subjects; Gross also showed “a modernist’s interest in [hitherto disregarded] Maori rock art” (64). English-born Patrick Hayman’s paintings mythologised his journeys between England and New Zealand, and the experience of being a perpetual “stranger in a strange land”. Bell sees in his work a strong response to the refugee experience itself, mediated through a specifically Jewish artistic sensibility (79). Similarly, the landscapes of German refugee Margot Philips, replete with symbolism and largely devoid of human figures, suggest to Bell something of “her place as a refugee, both here and there, and as mediations between belonging and otherness” (81). The Czech refugee architect Imric Porsolt helped invigorate and professionalise local art criticism; his writing appeared regularly in *Landfall*, and was informed by a deep immersion in European modernism.⁴⁸ Although he championed Woollaston and McCahon, Porsolt refused to see their work “through a narrow culturally nationalist lens”, says Bell, placing it instead “within a broader historical and international field” of artistic practice (66–69).

However, the literary contributions of the wartime exilic community have received less attention. The nomadic Anna Kavan, despite living in New Zealand for less than two years, undoubtedly made an impact with her scathing essay “New Zealand: An Answer to an Inquiry”, published in England in 1943. But the fiction she wrote here remained largely unknown until 2009 when *Anna Kavan’s New Zealand* (edited by Jennifer Sturm) appeared. Although some of these newly-discovered pieces are unfinished, they show Kavan articulating what C.K. Stead has called “a much deeper, more complex” response to her temporary home than her sometimes flippant essay conveys, and also the faint impress of the New Zealand writers she encountered here in the early 1940s:

There is also a style, a flavour, a turn of phrase that suggests now an influence of Sargeson’s fiction, now of Fairburn’s expository prose, and

⁴⁸ Porsolt died in 2005 and is buried in Auckland, where his gravestone describes him as a “Messenger of Modernism” (Bell, “Border Crossings” 68).

now a Curnovian overview of 'island and time'. This is work by a woman who, though already in her forties, went back to school here and became for a time 'a New Zealand writer'. (Stead, in J. Sturm 9)

Particularly striking is a piece titled "September" that emphatically positions Kavan as an exilic writer. It begins with an account of various dream-states in which she can be seen rehearsing the symbolic idiom (Chinese lions, portentous birds) that would increasingly inflect her fiction. Abruptly, though, Kavan sets down with devastating clarity a personal credo that might be embraced by any writer in exile: "To keep any claim to sanity one must simply submit and record what happens. Submit and record, I said. It's the only thing left" (J. Sturm 70). This is, writes Stead, not only a kind of realism but also "a kind, even, of nationalism; it is a moment in our intellectual history registered by a talented transient, sensitive to the New Zealand literary climate, and willing to submit to, and record, the facts of place and people as she found them" (in J. Sturm 9–10). Stead's analysis is a reminder of Said's notion of the symbiosis between the exilic and the nationalist sensibilities, "opposites informing and constituting each other" (Said 176).

The refugees from continental Europe who found shelter in New Zealand certainly included some imaginative writers, but very few had the desire or proficiency to write in English. By far the most eminent, at least in his homeland, was the German-Jewish poet and scholar Karl Wolfskehl who arrived in Auckland in 1938. Aged almost 70, impoverished and nearly blind, he was nonetheless eager to embrace whatever opportunities his new homeland offered. Improbably, he experienced something of a late-career renaissance in New Zealand, writing three major cycles of poems (all published posthumously in Europe) before his death in 1948. According to Friedrich Voit, New Zealand figures in this late verse essentially "as an archetypal place of exile" in which the poet is as stranded as the fig tree in his garden (42). Wolfskehl's poetic position is thus somewhat at odds with his personal one. His determination to make something of his new life, despite the losses he had suffered, has been well-documented – not least the friendships he made with local writers and intellectuals in Christchurch and on the North Shore, where he became particularly close to Mason, Fairburn and Sargeson (his complex relationship with the latter is described in chapter 4). However, Wolfskehl's literary impact was limited by the fact he wrote in German: apart from his fellow refugees, few people in New Zealand could read his work.

As Leonard Bell commented when launching a 2010 German-English collection of Wolfskehl's New Zealand poetry, there are in fact very few examples of German wartime

refugees writing in English anywhere in the world (“Notes” n.p.). In New Zealand, Czech Salomon Holzer published *Who Sow in Tears* (1944), an almost-forgotten autobiographical novel which appeared in English under the pseudonym Ben Akiba, while another Czech, Frederick Ost, published several volumes of his own verse and essays, as well as poems in translation. Also writing in English was Otti Binswanger, a German refugee who, with her husband Paul, spent ten years in Christchurch from 1939. Otti apparently flourished there, establishing a wide social circle, teaching rhythmic gymnastics, exhibiting sculpture and writing short fiction, primarily in a realist mode. Her collection of eight short stories, “*And How Do You Like This Country?*”, appeared in 1945. At the time, suggests Livia Käthe Wittman (whose essay accompanies the 2010 German edition of the collection), the Binswangers “felt commitment to their new country of residence” (94), even though Paul, an academic and linguist, was unable to secure a university position here. Later, though, Otti confessed to never having loved New Zealand, despite her best efforts. According to Wittman, she was “unable to grasp its reality”, and recorded her disillusionment with “[t]he apathy towards suffering ... the uniformity in education and life ... It is not my climate, not my country” (115). Certainly, Binswanger’s collection registers something of their author’s ambivalent emotions. Yet, with the exception of “Turnips” – which maps the contrasting responses of a group of neighbours to “the people with the foreign name” living in their street – these are not stories ‘about’ the experience of exile or adaptation. Binswanger’s characters are predominantly New Zealand farmers and schoolchildren, suburban matrons and builders, Jims and Bills and Phyllises. It is onto and through these Sargesonian ‘types’ that Binswanger projects a sense of displacement and estrangement. “Here in these islands,” one of her taciturn male characters observes, the compassionate and sensitive individual remains terminally isolated, destined to “suffer the pains of loneliness and ... fight hard against incomprehension and despair” (80). In these stories, the vision of the alienated outsider and the alienated native blur: apart from the occasionally awkward syntax, when Binswanger’s protagonist interrupts his high-country walk to survey the view, his words might almost be Curnow’s:⁴⁹

Nature takes vengeance on intruders ... The settlers who arrived here so bravely and pioneered for their modest ideal of making a living, they also have been and are stil[l], intruders as long as their thought has not wrestled with the country ... It is therefore their lot not to have any art,

⁴⁹

Allen and Betty Curnow were good friends of the Binswangers in Christchurch (Wittmann).

not to know nor to acknowledge the urge for something that endures.
("An End to Pioneering", 83)

In her foreword, Binswanger describes her work as "inside stories" rather than the work of "some presumptuous intruder" (7). In doing so, she stakes a place for herself within the local literary landscape, and claims the right to be considered a *writer* as much as an *exilic* writer. Her foreign name and refugee origins, she asserts, do not automatically determine the narrative positions and intentions of her fiction. Thus the collection seeks to gently disrupt the insider-outsider, belonging-estrangement binaries expected of exilic writing, as Binswanger tries out a variety of narrative perspectives and idioms: the woman with the foreign name, the man who tramps in the hills in the hope of touching "with his senses, his blood, his very soul, the land which he loves most, which has been his birthplace" (78), the dreamy child whose parents want him to become "a real boy" (26). However, it needs to be said that as an emerging writer working in a second language, Binswanger for the most part lacks the narrative control and versatility to realise her ambitions. A more successful representation of the themes that interest her is to be found in Christchurch artist Donald MacDiarmid's unsettling painting of Binswanger, *The Immigrant* (1945). Here, she appears out-of-scale in a spatially distorted "fictional modernist interior" – forever fixed, says Bell, as "an outsider presented uncomfortably inside" (*In Transit* 22, 21).

Meeting points

The fact that few exilic writers chose to write in English, or were able to, constrained their literary impact on New Zealand writers. There is no comparison with the enormous impact on local architecture of the European modernist practices and ideas introduced by refugee architects, for example. Nonetheless, the imaginative writing and private correspondence of figures such as Sargeson, Fairburn and Curnow – the local writers most heavily engaged in the project of "creat[ing] modern New Zealand literature" (Evans, *History* 88) – reveal their complex and sometimes unexpected responses to the exilic sensibilities and European inflections in their midst.

The two worlds came together at parties, dinners and other gatherings that ranged in tone from the cultivated to the riotous. Such occasions allowed two marginal groups to enjoy common ground and, often, mutual admiration. In Christchurch, for example, the refugee and artistic communities regularly converged at the "revolutionary modernist house" designed by Plischke for the German-Jewish scientist Otto Frankel and his artist wife Margaret Anderson

(Bell and Morrow 340); at the Binswangers' home; or at Betty and Allen Curnow's. Among the regulars were Curnow, Glover (before he went away to the war), Rita Angus, Helen Shaw, Douglas Lilburn, Leo Bensemann and others associated with the Caxton Press – all, according to Bell, “self-consciously positioned outside mainstream art circles and institutions” and with “little time for the conventional, formulaic, Anglo-oriented parochial and ‘polite’ arts of the city” (*In Transit* 18). Some were doubtless dazzled by the aura of cosmopolitan sophistication surrounding the exiles: perhaps Lochore had them in mind when he wrote of the “little groups of New Zealand intellectuals who fawn on [the refugees]” (83). But, in reality, the dynamics of such encounters were far from one-sided. After Karl Wolfskehl visited the Binswangers in 1941, he wrote to a Swiss friend that he had “found something like an artistic-literary circle centred around a little, very active publishing firm [The Caxton Press] which promotes taste and quality – their evening events recall old atelier memories!” It was this stimulating company, he said, that had allowed him to “finally feel at home in New Zealand” (quoted in Voit 44). In such exchanges, we see how the local and exilic sensibilities might animate each other, opening doors to an alternative “home in thought” (Cook) beyond the dreary primness of wartime Christchurch.

In Auckland, which was becoming the locus of the cultural nationalist project by the mid-1940s, the exilic community had several centres of gravity, mostly on the North Shore. At Torbay, recent European arrivals might gather at the home of Ian Hamilton and Anna Kavan or the nearby holiday house of lawyer Frank Haigh, a friend and supporter of many wartime exiles. In either place, they could rub shoulders with Fairburn, McCormack, Mason, Sargeson and the architect Vernon Brown (J. Sturm 45–46). Although Sargeson himself was not given to partying, his bach in Takapuna was another place where Auckland exiles and the wider artistic community congregated to gossip, argue, discuss books and drink. As well as many of the Torbay set, Sargeson's regular visitors included the young Maurice Duggan, Wolfskehl, Stewe, Texidor and Driescher, sculptor Molly Macalister, and her future husband George Haydn. As chapter 4 describes, Texidor and Driescher's home (and caravan) in nearby East Coast Road was another gathering point where “North Shore writers and their friends regularly gathered on Saturdays over Mediterranean-style food and Lemora” (Barrowman, *Mason* 303). After his first visit there, Duggan wrote shyly to Texidor and Driescher, thanking them for their hospitality: “truth to tell I was feeling a little strange. You helped remove this strangeness. Perhaps it was the coffee, perhaps the ice water, or more possibly

the conversation”.⁵⁰ One senses that coffee and iced water, perhaps even stimulating conversation, were relatively new discoveries for Duggan. More refined evenings could be enjoyed in the newly-built modernist homes of wealthy émigrés such as the Kulkas who, like the Kahns in Wellington, regularly invited refugee and local friends to share food, wine, conversation and music. For those seeking more excitement, there were the legendary parties of printer Bob Lowry at One Tree Hill which, over time, “bec[a]me synonymous with Auckland Bohemian depravity” (Richards 92).

Texidor captures the flavour of the times in “Goodbye Forever”, written probably in 1946 but unpublished until its inclusion in *In Fifteen Minutes You Can Say a Lot* in 1987. Her novella deserves attention for many reasons. Here, I want to confine my discussion to its representation of the exilic and intellectual worlds that were commingling on the North Shore in the mid-1940s; as one of Texidor’s characters observes, it is a time when “all the intellectuals go around with refugees. In a place like Auckland who else is there to go round with?” (*Fifteen Minutes* 204).⁵¹ It is a sardonic and sometimes brutal portrait of two groups tied together not so much by mutual regard or shared sensibility, than out of sheer desperation. Texidor represents them as a community of outcasts:

A little group of people cast by a gale onto an island. Far away from the world? The rest of the world submerged. A group of people having nothing in common. Yes one thing. A leper colony. (208)

Texidor focalises the colony’s assorted anxieties through an unnamed narrator, a semi-invalid writer living in a decrepit North Shore bach, and through her protagonist, the beautiful and increasingly suicidal Viennese refugee Lili Lehman. Lili is at once a tragic and a comic figure – spirited, delusional, caustic, self-pitying, deeply damaged by a past that Texidor discloses in fragments, careering towards a self-destructive future whose outcome is apparent to everyone except herself. Lili’s central tragedy, however, is *not* that she is a refugee in New Zealand where her glamour and sexual confidence attracts disapproving stares in the street, “[even] though she was so simply dressed in sports clothes and no lipstick, hardly any” (193). It is that she is lost and always has been, betrayed by a syphilitic and philandering father, abandoned by a husband who killed himself because he could not make her happy and by a succession of unsuitable lovers. By locating the source of Lili’s despair beyond her

⁵⁰ Duggan to Texidor, Thursday [1944?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

⁵¹ Throughout, all quotations from Texidor’s published fiction are from this source.

immediate situation as a refugee, Texidor places her character in a psychic landscape of “homelessness and non-being” (Adorno 33), a place anyone might inhabit, not only those in exile. It is not Lili’s place in the narrative to represent the refugee experience or the exilic sensibility, nor to provide readers with a satisfyingly exotic projection of exilic suffering. In fact, Texidor’s savage and pitiless portrait of the exilic-artistic community is mediated not primarily through Lili but through the quietly cynical narrator, the unnamed writer. He is undoubtedly a linchpin in this narcissistic community of outcasts. But he chooses to stand apart from many of its habits and institutions, the “masochistic coffee parties with all the intelligentsia squirming with culture, hearing what’s wrong with them in a foreign accent” (204). It is through his jaundiced eyes that we see the “trying” Dr Lewenthal – who must, however, be tolerated: “look what he was before Hitler” (204) – and the loquacious local poet John Priest “who kept the art of conversation alive in New Zealand” (211). We meet the charismatic Professor Salmonson, who can always be relied on to bring the beer and a retinue of desperately unconventional students “who give one to understand that they write poetry” (209). The narrator is more kindly disposed towards his friend Ursula, but she too shares in the anguish of the intelligentsia, wearing the “sad look of a cow gazing over a fence seeing all the juicy pastures of civilisation” (208). Then there is the perennially-dissatisfied Eileen Farnham, an Englishwoman stranded here by the war, who rejects the “barbarity of New Zealanders” in favour of the ““intellectual set””. In practice, this amounts to “drinking coffee instead of tea, eating at the Chinese, and probably sleeping with Professor Salmonson” (206).

There is much fun to be had in guessing the real identities behind Texidor’s characters – Sargeson, E.P. Dawson, Fairburn, Kavan and Hamilton are almost certainly among them. Perhaps Lili owes something to Sargeson’s occasional visitor, the “incredibly handsome Jewess” whose “chatter” amused him as much as the reactions of local women when she offered to teach their husbands German (see also page 55). In any event, it seems highly likely that Texidor wrote “Goodbye Forever” at least in part to vent her frustrations with the rancorous atmosphere of the North Shore circle, which eventually contributed to her decision to leave New Zealand. But “Goodbye Forever” is more than just a brutally comic dismemberment of a place Texidor longed to leave. The novella – particularly in its longer form, the unpublished draft of which is held at the State Library of New South Wales – is also an exploration of the many varieties of alienation and loneliness afflicting residents of the “leper colony”, whether temporary or permanent. Like Curnow and Fairburn, Texidor apprehends in the geographically-isolated and tenuously inhabited landscape of her new

home a projection of something deeper – not an embryonic nation, however, but a confirmation of human insignificance. Texidor’s characters are like Kavan’s “few transplanted” people cast away in these “weird, unearthly, resplendent islands ... implacably blockaded by empty antarctic seas” (Kavan 161–162). Exiles and New Zealanders alike, they come together not to build new lives or create a community, but fearfully, as outsiders filled with existential dread and irrevocably cut adrift from “the snug little suburb which might blow away into the sea, and no one would ever miss it” (*Fifteen Minutes* 208).

* * *

The wartime encounter between exilic and local writers, especially those at the forefront of the nationalist project, was located not only in physical meetings and personal relationships. As I have suggested here, it was also a coming-together of shared and unexpectedly compatible creative sensibilities, and its lineaments can be traced in the fiction the encounter gave rise to. There, the exilic and the nationalist intermingle. As I discuss later in relation to the work of Texidor and Sargeson, there are signs of European modernism starting to inflect the idiom of critical realism. Insiders adopt the narrative positions of outsiders and outsiders of insiders, refugees are not alone in their alienation, and ‘not-belonging’ is a state of being that anyone can access. It is literature animated by what Said has called a “plurality of vision [that] gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is *contrapuntal*” (186).

Brasch – poet, founding editor of *Landfall*, and arguably the most important curator of mid-century New Zealand literature – has been depicted as an emblem of these unexpected conjunctions between the exilic and the nationalist. Bruce Harding writes of his “exilic marginality” (71), a term he borrows from Said to describe Brasch’s multiple split allegiances: to the northern and southern hemispheres; to his ancestral Jewishness and his local roots; to an intellectual elite and to the Dunedin commercial world he was born into; to the cultural nationalist project and to a borderless internationalism. Straddling these many worlds, Brasch can be seen as the antipodean ‘wandering Jew’, at home nowhere and everywhere, both culturally displaced and – having discovered abroad that “New Zealand lived in [him] as no other country could live” (*Indirections* 360) – also utterly at home. Thus, far from pursuing a programme of simplistic cultural nationalism, Brasch’s *Landfall* sought to position New Zealand arts within wider and older traditions, neither on the margins looking wistfully towards the centre nor striking off on a narrow independent course.

According to Harding, a “mature sense of inter-connectedness” shaped Brasch’s editorial (and poetic) vision: “His focus was clearly on New Zealand work, contextualised in a wider European context” (76). Bertram corroborates this, describing his old friend as “one of the true mediators between the old world of Europe and the Mediterranean, and the newer world of Pacific islands still trying to discover where they really belong” (21).

Brasch certainly embodies a powerful mid-century conjunction between cultural worlds and creative sensibilities, but it is by no means the only one. The coming-together of Greville Texidor and Frank Sargeson is another such potent encounter. Before examining its nature and effects, I want to summarise Texidor’s background and the singular circumstances that brought her to New Zealand.

CHAPTER 2

And now Greville has turned up ...

The woman who became Greville Texidor was born Margaret Greville Foster in 1902, in the Midlands town of Wolverhampton.⁵² Her father William Foster (1862-1919) practised locally as a solicitor; her mother Editha Greville Prideaux (1866-1953) was a sometime painter who had studied at the Slade School of Fine Art in the 1890s. Importantly for Greville's future, Editha lived for a time in New Zealand with her parents. It was there that she began painting, exhibiting her oils with the Auckland Society of Arts between 1887 and 1894; a guide to nineteenth-century New Zealand artists says Editha was seen as a "painter of great promise" (Platts 199).

Greville grew up at The Limes, an impressive Italianate-style house (complete with belvedere tower) on the outskirts of Sedgely, a little south of Wolverhampton proper.⁵³ Her sister Kate (Katharine Prideaux Foster), to whom she remained close throughout her life, was born in 1904.⁵⁴ It was a comfortable childhood in a household with servants, nannies and, at least for a time, a governess for the two girls. There were holidays abroad, and a busy life full of social and public engagements.⁵⁵ Although William Foster had links to the Conservative Party, the family's politics leaned towards the Liberal. He is said to have defended miners during one of the strikes that spread throughout the Midlands in the period 1910-1920, while Editha provided lunches for the families of striking miners on the lawn at The Limes. One of her sisters was a suffragette and had been imprisoned.⁵⁶

⁵² Throughout, I refer to Greville Texidor by her surname when her work or her identity as a writer is under discussion. However when, as here, the focus is primarily biographical – and particularly in the context of her early life, before she took the name 'Texidor' – I refer to her as 'Greville'.

⁵³ My account of Greville's early life in Wolverhampton draws on the research of Christine Buckley, who wrote text for an interpretation board about The Limes erected by the Sedgely Local History Society in 2014. Ms Buckley passed on information she had unearthed about the house and the Foster/Prideaux families to Charlotte Kurzke (Greville's niece), who in turn shared it with Cristina Patterson Texidor. I am grateful to Cristina for allowing me access to Ms Buckley's letters.

⁵⁴ Kate was subsequently known as Kate Mangan, following her 1931 marriage to the American scholar, poet, journalist and Trotskyist activist Sherry Mangan (1904-1961) and later as Kate Kurzke after meeting the German Marxist and International Brigadist Jan Kurzke (1905-?) in 1934.

⁵⁵ Kurzke to Sargeson, undated [1977?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-4261-097. ATL.

⁵⁶ Interview with Rosamunda Droescher, 29 April 2015.

Writing to Sargeson late in life, Kate Kurzke recalled her sister as a dominant and sometimes domineering presence, “over-poweringly vital, active and extrovert”, the “Queen Bee” in their relationship.⁵⁷ Greville was particularly close to their father, who had aspired to a theatrical career in his youth and whose “buoyant and manic” personality she shared.⁵⁸ It was William who preferred to call her by her androgynous middle name, and Greville was the only family member regularly invited into his study to discuss books and writing.⁵⁹ By twelve, Greville was already physically mature, hiding “love letters from boys ... in a hole in the garden and enclosing rather greasy locks of hair, and riding on the backs of their motor bikes”.⁶⁰ Perhaps to curb her unruly energies, she was sent to Cheltenham Ladies’ College as a boarder in September 1917. There, she was a member of the Dramatic Society and learned elocution from an elderly actress – Kate recalled Greville’s dramatic recitations of Tennyson’s “Splendour Falls on the Castle Walls” – but otherwise seems to have left little mark on the school, and vice versa: there are no records of her having passed any examinations whatsoever (R. Roberts). She told Frank Sargeson that she hated school and is variously said to have been expelled or run away (Smithyman, introduction 8).

Her schooling did indeed come to an abrupt end in 1919, when she was seventeen. In that year, her father committed suicide after being named a defendant in a highly publicised libel trial. Following the 1918 ‘khaki’ election, the unsuccessful Labour candidate for the Wolverhampton seat of Bilston claimed to have been slandered by his rival Colonel Hickman, the sitting MP, and two of Hickman’s supporters. One was William Foster. Convinced his career and reputation were ruined, on a snowy January night while his wife and daughters were in London, he stepped into the path of an express train (“Mr W.A. Foster”).

In the wake of William’s suicide and the prurient local interest it no doubt generated, Mrs Foster and her daughters left Wolverhampton for London. Living first in Maida Vale and then in Bayswater, Editha resumed painting and reconnected with the artists who had been her contemporaries at the Slade. The Fosters’ social circle included Mark Gertler, Richard

⁵⁷ Kurzke to Sargeson, undated [1977?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-4261-097. ATL.

⁵⁸ Kurzke to Sargeson, undated [1977?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-4261-097. ATL.

⁵⁹ R. Droescher to F. Barrowman, 7 July 1987. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 12. SLNSW.

⁶⁰ Kurzke to Sargeson, 8 August 1976. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-4261-097. ATL.

Carline and Stanley Spencer: reportedly, Mrs Foster lent Spencer the “fancy nightgowns” worn by figures in his celebrated painting “The Resurrection, Cookham” (1924-27), and Spencer also painted or drew Kate on several occasions (Smithyman, introduction 15). Greville purportedly modelled for Augustus John and, according to Gertler’s wife Marjorie, “fell deeply in love with David his eldest son who was fine to look at and musical. Indeed, I think David was the man she was most moved by in her life. However, he didn’t want her”.⁶¹ Stanley Spencer’s brother Gilbert may also have painted a portrait of Greville, but it has never been identified.⁶² She certainly modelled for Mark Gertler, prompting a quarrel that permanently tainted their relationship: she wanted her name to appear in the title of the portrait, but Gertler refused.⁶³ Years later, Greville would pillory Gertler and others in her novella *These Dark Glasses* (Allentuck 229: see also chapter 8 of this thesis).

Kate, meanwhile, was studying art at the Slade, and she and Greville became part of what has been called “the younger fringe of the Bloomsbury set” (Wald 92). They are said to have met (and read) both Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf, and known D.H. Lawrence.⁶⁴ But their ties were primarily to a younger and less cerebral cohort – the giddy, bohemian, irresponsible Bright Young Things of early 1920s London. Kate recalled its similarity to the world of Evelyn Waugh’s *Vile Bodies* and *Decline and Fall* – in fact, while working as a mannequin, she got to know “the original of [Waugh’s character] Miss Agatha Runcible ... the daughter of a socialist aristocrat who worked at Prince Yousoupoff’s dress shop in Berkel[e]y St ... the same man who helped push Rasputin through the ice”.⁶⁵ There were costume parties; lavish dinners at the Tour Eiffel restaurant and the Cavendish Hotel; intimate evenings at Holland House with ‘Stavvy’, the Earl of Ilchester, renowned for his generosity, his swan salami (sourced from his personal swannery in Dorset) and his

⁶¹ M. Gertler to R. Driescher, 1975. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 21. SLNSW.

⁶² Interview with Cristina Patterson Texidor, 30 April 2015.

⁶³ Gertler’s portrait, entitled simply *Head of a Girl*, is in the Glasgow Art Gallery’s collection and appears on the cover of *In Fifteen Minutes You Can Say A Lot* (1987). R. Driescher to F. Barrowman, 7 July 1987. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 12. SLNSW.

⁶⁴ R. Driescher to F. Barrowman, 7 July 1987. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 12. SLNSW.

⁶⁵ Kurzke to Sargeson, undated [1977?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-4261-097. ATL.

mistresses.⁶⁶ It was an exhilarating, unconventional world laced with risk, and Greville was at the heart of it.

She seems to have had no inclination to write at this time. According to scholar Marcia Allentuck – who corresponded at length with Kate Kurzke about these years – Greville “lived freely and never attempted her pen” (228). She allegedly won an all-England beauty contest and appeared in an unnamed movie as the Countess of Chesterfield.⁶⁷ But her real passion was dancing, and she performed in some of the most popular London shows of the time. According to Marjorie Gertler, Greville and another dancer would be sent bottles of champagne at the theatre by aristocratic admirers, and “Lord Ilchester [and] P.G. Wodehouse, who were friends, used to take [them] out to nightclubs and she sometimes danced with the Prince of Wales there”.⁶⁸ It was around this time that Greville was introduced to drugs, allegedly by Curtis Moffat, husband of the poet and artists’ model Iris Tree.

Tiring of London, Greville joined a travelling dance troupe and danced her way across Europe, North Africa and North America, joined sometimes by her mother. In the United States, she performed at New York’s Winter Garden, did some fashion modelling and became friendly with musicians George Gershwin and Virgil Thomson. She also briefly married an Englishman whose name she later claimed to have forgotten, telling friends that “he wasn’t a very memorable person” (Smithyman, introduction 9).⁶⁹ Before long, she was part of a ‘skeleton dance’ act with a German contortionist, touring extensively and acquiring a heroin habit along the way. Twice, her mother came to the rescue and installed her in a Paris detoxification clinic. In the mid-1920s, Greville was living in Montparnasse, dancing and working as an occasional mannequin for Mademoiselle Chanel, with whom Kate had a two-year modelling contract. From Paris, she continued to tour Europe in musicals and with

⁶⁶ Kurzke to Sargeson, undated [1977?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-4261-097. ATL.

⁶⁷ Sargeson to Dawson, 6 February 1944. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/002. HC.

⁶⁸ M. Gertler to R. Droescher, 1975. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 21. SLNSW.

⁶⁹ According to Rosamunda Droescher, the mysterious Mr Wilson (not his real name) was a British army officer whom Greville met before leaving England. They honeymooned at Niagara Falls, but the marriage lasted only two weeks because, said Greville, Mr Wilson “had the nasty habit of reading the newspapers at breakfast”. R. Droescher to F. Barrowman, 7 July 1987. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 12. SLNSW.

an act called the “Twelve Cocktail Girls”; at Barcelona’s grand opera house, they performed the first Charleston the city had ever seen.⁷⁰

Patchy and largely unverifiable though they are, these biographical fragments suggest a restless, refractory young woman, poorly-educated but highly intelligent and well-read. Already somewhat damaged and certainly capable of damaging others, she had launched herself energetically into the world beyond provincial England, determined to drink in all it had to offer. As Sargeson would later write: “She belonged to the generation which came to maturity in the twenties, for whom World War One was as much a liberation as a disaster” (“Greville Texidor” 135).

It was in Barcelona that Greville met Mañuel (Manolo) Texidor, a dashing local businessman, entrepreneur and motor-cycle racer. He was from a wealthy and well-established Catalan family that disapproved of his liaison with a dancer, so the couple travelled to Argentina where they married in 1929. Their daughter Cristina was born in 1930. After the failure of the cork factory Manolo had attempted to establish in Buenos Aires, the family returned to Spain. They settled initially in Barcelona, Manolo’s home town, but soon shifted up the Costa Brava coast to the village of Tossa de Mar, a place Greville would return to imaginatively and in person throughout her life.

Tossa, which Marc Chagall dubbed the “Blue Paradise”, was then a magnet for artists, writers and intellectuals from around Europe, including refugees from Nazi Germany (MacDougall 289). Residents and regular visitors included Chagall and fellow-artists Georges Kars, Lola Bech, Oskar Zügel and André Masson; in 1935-36, New Zealand painter Frances Hodgkins visited and spent time with Greville.⁷¹ Tossa was a beautiful (and then cheap) seaside village where Greville found she could surround herself “with Paris and London people as in the past”.⁷² Nonetheless, her novella *These Dark Glasses* would later savage the inhabitants of

⁷⁰ R. Driescher to F. Barrowman, 7 July 1987. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 12. SLNSW.

⁷¹ Many years later, Texidor wrote an account of their meeting which, although never published, was sent to E.H. McCormick when he was working on *Portrait of Frances Hodgkins* (1981). McCormick’s study devotes several pages to Hodgkins’s visit to Tossa, but does not mention Texidor. R. Driescher to F. Barrowman, 7 July 1987. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 12. SLNSW. A slightly different version of Texidor’s account is held at the University of Auckland library. MS, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 2, Folder 8. UA.

⁷² R. Driescher to F. Barrowman, 7 July 1987. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 12. SLNSW.

this pre-war bohemian enclave who, Greville considered, had insulated themselves from the impending European catastrophe. Her venomous fictional portrait of Tossa and its habitués is matched by Mark Gertler's disparaging report of encountering *her* in a very similar French seaside resort, Cassis, during the same period.⁷³ Nicknamed Bloomsbury-by-Sea, Cassis was undeniably charming, wrote Gertler (MacDougall 313). However:

it is *filled* with the 'Bohemia' of London – absolutely packed – futile men and prostitute-like women. Mostly semi-acquaintances of a sort one tries to avoid like poison in London, and now Greville has turned up! Kate [Foster] and her 'boy' are coming ... So that the whole place seems like a lunatic asylum. (Gertler 245)

Meanwhile, Greville and Manolo's marriage had collapsed, and she had begun a relationship with Werner Droscher (1911-1978), a young man working in Tossa as a private tutor to a German family. Nine years younger than Greville, Werner was born to a politically conservative family in Karlsruhe, Germany, where he trained as a teacher and transformed himself into a socialist. In 1933, as life in Hitler's Germany became increasingly difficult for someone of his political persuasions, he had jumped at the chance of a job on the Costa Brava (Cleary, introduction 1).

In 1936, Werner was preparing to go to Barcelona to study fulltime at the university while Greville stayed on in Tossa. She had leased and was renovating a sixteenth-century farmhouse on the outskirts of the village. Known as Casa Sans or "The House of Good Waters", it was reached by a track running through the woods and past olive groves. Standing on a rocky rise with mountains behind and the Mediterranean in the distance, it was (and remains) a beguiling site. Texidor had quickly formed what she called "an almost unnatural affection for [it] and in a way, thought more of it than I did of myself or even my family".⁷⁴ But political events disrupted the couple's plans. In July 1936, a group of Spanish Army generals in Madrid, backed by right-wing groups including the Nationalists and the Fascist Falange, overthrew the elected Republican government. Republican supporters of various

⁷³ They both holidayed in Cassis during the summer of 1938, Gertler's last: he committed suicide in June 1939 (MacDougall 326-27). Kate Kurzke shed more light on the origins of the mutual antipathy between Gertler and Texidor when she told Sargeson that Gertler "hated G. anyway possibly he made a pass at her & she did not respond" (Kurzke to Sargeson, undated [1976?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-4261-097. ATL).

⁷⁴ Unpublished essay on Frances Hodgkins. MS, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 2, Folder 8. UA.

political hues – centrists, communists, anarchists, syndicalists and others – rose up in opposition, and the Spanish Civil War was underway.

In his memoir *Free Society: A German Exile in Revolutionary Spain*,⁷⁵ Werner admits that the outbreak of war took the couple by surprise. The first hint of trouble came when they were unable to make phone calls to Barcelona. Next, the local police disappeared from Tossa, and an attempted military takeover in nearby Girona was rumoured. By then:

It was getting obvious that a fierce civil war was raging in Barcelona, however it was not clear whether it was a purely Catalan separatist affair... After a few days of great anxiety we heard on the radio a speech by the Catalan chief of government who, with a voice trembling with emotion, informed the people that the military rebellion had been crushed in Catalonia, with the aid of the trade unions... the anarcho-syndicalists and the FAI (anarchists). (7)

Soon after, truckloads of armed anarchists arrived in Tossa from a neighbouring town.⁷⁶ Proclaiming that “God is dead”, they destroyed the local churches but spared the priests. The anarchists met no significant resistance and were soon in charge of the local police and civil administration, to the bewilderment of foreigners in the town. Amid rumours of heavy fighting elsewhere in Spain and regular flyovers by military aircraft from Italy, many British and French nationals were evacuated by British warships, although Werner was convinced they were in no danger: “I believe today that the British, afraid of Red revolution, did their utmost to foster the mood of panic” (8).

Werner went to Barcelona as planned, although now with the aim of “join[ing] in the fight against fascism” (9). After a bitter struggle with the military, local workers had taken control of the city and anarchist flags flew everywhere. Eager for action, Werner enlisted with the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista) whose headquarters was the Hotel Falcon.⁷⁷ There, a motley group of foreigners assembled and gradually formed themselves into a

⁷⁵ Driescher published a German memoir, *Odysee eines Lehrers*, in Munich in 1976. It did not appear in English until 2012, when an extract – with some supplementary material – was published as *Free Society* by the Kate Sharpley Library in London. Farrell Cleary wrote the introduction.

⁷⁶ They were affiliated with two separate groups, the CNT (Confederación Nacional de Trabajo) and the FAI (Federación Anarquista Ibérica).

⁷⁷ POUM was formed in 1935 by communists who rejected the policies and strategies of Stalin’s Soviet Union. George Orwell also fought with the POUM militia in 1937, recounting his experiences in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).

platoon or *centuria* – “a little International Brigade in miniature” comprising four Frenchmen, two young Swiss, two Hungarians, an Italian and Werner (10).

Werner later admitted that, in his political naivety, he was then unaware of the deep tensions between the various leftist groups active in Barcelona – the anti-Stalinist POUM, the foreign Trotskyists supporting them, the anarcho-syndicalists, and the official Spanish Communist Party. “I believed we all fought for social revolution and against Fascism and that it did not really matter to which party or political group one belonged,” he remembered (9). In reality, the mistrust, divisions and betrayals that would eventually tear the Left apart, recounted by Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia*, were already in play. Before long, Werner was himself disenchanted with the communists, calling them “knowalls who claimed the absolute truth of their political convictions ... ambitious, powerlusting politicians” (10). Increasingly, he would be drawn to the anarchists’ cause, finding in their beliefs “everything that had been missing among the communists: a truly social behaviour of the individual, a form of organisation in which men were free but would agree voluntarily to restrictions limiting their freedom” (11).

Meanwhile Greville, having sent Cristina to England to be cared for by Mrs Foster, joined Werner in Barcelona. They were married in an anarchist ceremony, becoming *compañero* and *compañera* (12). The next day, Werner and his *centuria* set off for the Aragón front to help defend the village of La Zaida from the Fascist forces dug in nearby, while Greville remained in Barcelona.

She left no diaries or letters from this period; most of what is known of her wartime activities is filtered through Werner’s memoir, or drawn from her unpublished autobiographical novel *Shadows of War*. As evidence of her personal ideological convictions and motivations, both sources must necessarily be approached with caution. But Rosamunda Droescher is adamant that her mother was no mere adventurer or camp-follower: “Greville was a rifle-carrying militia woman,” she has written. From the outset of the war, “her sympathy was with the anarchists (not POUM and even less with the communists) and her subsequent ... political work was with and for the anarchists ie. it was not all entirely to do with Werner”.⁷⁸ Moreover, Greville was far from being a “stupid society girl”, as Gertler had dismissed her.

⁷⁸ R. Droescher to F. Barrowman, 7 July 1987. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 12. SLNSW.

She acquired a sound intellectual understanding of anarchist principles and history, believes Rosamunda, by virtue of her links to the inner circle of Barcelona anarchists (see chapter 7).⁷⁹ Equally, though, there is no reason to believe that the ardour and sense of adventure that had patterned Greville's life until now did not also influence her involvement in the Civil War, alongside political conviction. Greville's elder daughter Cristina believed emotion certainly coloured her political allegiances – her mother sometimes spoke of simply not having “liked” communists very much, and being “more attracted” to the anarchists.⁸⁰ Perhaps, at least in part, Greville's wartime activities were propelled by the same emotional energies and idealism that drove her sister Kate, who covered the war as a correspondent and also (as Greville would do) wrote propaganda for the Republican cause. “In a war one is euphoric,” Kate told Sargeson in the 1970s. “‘High’ on danger. [In Spain] I was writing propaganda for a cause I believed in at a time when I had the illusion that propaganda could make a difference”.⁸¹

From Barcelona, Greville tracked down Werner's whereabouts with great difficulty. Eventually she joined him at the front, at La Zaida beside the Ebro River. By this stage, his POUM *centuria* had disintegrated, and the couple now committed themselves fully to the anarchist cause. They became part of a new anarchist *centuria* whose members were mostly tram drivers and conductors from the Barcelona suburb of Las Corts. As the only English speakers in the group, they were reportedly invited to meet the iconic American anarchist activist Emma Goldman when she visited the front; they would meet her again later in Barcelona and London (Derby 96–97, 105). But apart from feigning an attack on the Nationalist-held town of Quinto, they saw little action. According to Werner, their time was mostly spent standing guard, digging defensive trenches and trying to persuade the local peasants to form an agricultural collective. Before long, the couple was sent back to Barcelona to become part of a new militia unit assembling there. They boarded with an anarchist family in La Corta and were impressed by the spirit of voluntary cooperation they found, especially the “tranquil cheerfulness” of the women who dispensed services and aid to other residents (Droescher 13).

⁷⁹ Interview with Rosamunda Droescher, 4 December 2014.

⁸⁰ Interview with Cristina Patterson Texidor, 24 April 2015.

⁸¹ Kurzke to Sargeson, undated [1977?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-4261-097. ATL.

Equipped with new weapons, their *centuria* was again dispatched to the northern sector of the Aragón front. In August 1936, Greville and Werner joined in the attack on the town of Almudévar, managing “to creep up within sight of the elaborate barbed-wire defences of the fascists who defended their positions with rifle, machine-gun and artillery fire” (14). But the anarchists lacked sufficient troops to break through, and were forced to shelter in caves dug into the hillsides. After a few wet, cold weeks, it was clear they had no hope of moving forward. They subsequently learned that a communist militia was meant to come north to support the anarchists’ advance, but had failed to turn up. Years later, a prominent Italian anarchist who also fought at Almudévar recalled bitterly that “the communists had misled us with their promise of a thousand men, who they had decided not to send, since such reinforcement would have assured success and boosted the anarchists’ prestige, when they really wanted to see them discredited” (Marzocchi 10).

Disheartened, Greville and Werner returned briefly to determinedly non-interventionist England, where they wrote propaganda and raised funds for aid organisations. But the couple found scant satisfaction from stuffing envelopes in smoky offices in south London, drinking weak tea while drafting pamphlets that sought to stir a national conscience sunk in what Orwell called the “deep, deep sleep of England” (*Homage to Catalonia* 196). The savagery of the fighting in Spain seemed distant, the conflict and betrayals between leftist groups disheartening, and the general progress of the war depressing: “As time went on, it was sad to read how the revolution was being watered down ... [and] finally liquidated by the communist government,” Werner recalled (Droescher 15). Nonetheless, they decided to return to Spain in late 1937, this time to care for children evacuated from Madrid, which had been under heavy bombardment by the Nationalist rebels and their European fascist allies since October 1936.

Greville and Werner were appointed to run a home for evacuees in Cantonigròs, a village high in the mountains north-west of Barcelona – one of two hostels established there by an aid agency of opaque provenance, the Paris-based Commission des Enfants. In a large villa on the outskirts of the village, they were house parents to some twenty “high-spirited and affectionate” children ranging from toddlers to teenagers (Droescher 18). Greville’s daughter Cristina, aged seven, travelled from England to join them. While the evacuees’ schooling was the responsibility of the teachers who had accompanied them from Madrid – “vain Spanish schoolmasters, who very soon began to intrigue against the ‘foreigners’”, remembered

Werner (19) – everything else fell to Greville and Werner. They ensured their charges were warm and well-fed through the tough winter months: local villagers provided whatever food they could spare, and other supplies were brought by truck over the French border. They wrote potted life stories to send to sponsors, and hosted a procession of sympathetic foreign visitors. They organised outdoor activities – vegetable gardening, river swims and long bracing walks that alarmed the streetwise young Madrileños in their care, more comfortable with footpaths than forests. The potent imaginative impact of these experiences can be seen in Greville’s stories “San Toni” and “Jesús Jiménez”, both written in New Zealand in the early 1940s but unpublished in her lifetime.⁸²

The couple’s work in Cantonigròs ended abruptly in late 1938 after a visit from a representative of the Commission des Enfants. It was known that some of the foreign aid agencies working in Spain were Moscow-backed, camouflaging their activities under neutral names in order to “infiltrate into the organisations of state” (Droescher 16). Unwittingly, Werner and Greville had ended up working for one. Their openly disdainful visitor made it clear that the organisation did not wish the children’s home to be run by non-communists, and Werner and Greville were dismissed.

Returning to Barcelona, the couple endured a few weeks of aerial bombing that left the whole city “in a state of nervous hysteria” (Droescher 20). Exhausted, Greville took the opportunity to be evacuated aboard a British cruiser while Werner remained to secure the documentation he needed to leave Spain, profoundly depressed at the failure of the anarchist revolution. His attempt to join Greville in England nearly ended disastrously when, having reached Newhaven, he was prevented from disembarking and sent back to Nazi Germany.⁸³ There, the Gestapo questioned him closely about his time in Spain before sending him off to do military service that, according to one source, involved nothing more dangerous than participating in a *tableau vivant* staged for Hitler’s birthday (Cleary, introduction 2–3). Other sources suggest somewhat more taxing training, specialising in intelligence and

⁸² “Jesús Jiménez” is included in *In Fifteen Minutes You Can Say A Lot* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1987). “San Toni”, edited by Evelyn M. Hulse, was published online in 2006 (*Brief* 34: 85–119). See also chapter 7.

⁸³ Legal memorandum re Mr Werner Droescher, undated and unsigned. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 21. SLNSW.

communications (see libcom.org). In any case, Werner was allowed to leave the army, and managed to make his way to England.

The couple again began working with refugee children, this time with Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Europe (Cleary, “Werner Droeschner” 106). They began to think seriously of emigration: to the United States, Mexico or perhaps New Zealand, where Mrs Foster had lived in her youth. Smithyman says they decided to formally marry at least in part to improve their emigration prospects (introduction 11). But the marriage could not have come at a worse time. After war broke out in September 1939, they were both interned as enemy aliens. Werner was sent to a camp in Devon while Greville – who openly declared her anarchist convictions to the classifying tribunal hearing her case⁸⁴ – was sent to Holloway Prison. It seems she was imprisoned for not much more than a month, but was deeply traumatised by the combined effects of confinement and ostracism. She once told her younger daughter it was the worst thing that ever happened to her, and left her with a lifelong sense of betrayal – “by Churchill, by the Stalinists, by the British”.⁸⁵

But following the intervention of the indefatigable Mrs Foster and some well-connected supporters (including the Society of Friends, a member of Parliament, the musician Sidonie Goossens and the Earl of Ilchester), Werner and Greville were released on appeal.⁸⁶ Mrs Foster secured them passage on a ship to New Zealand, whose “main attraction was that it was as far away as possible from the trauma and disappointments of Europe” (Cleary, introduction 3). After a dangerous journey across the Atlantic, where U-boats presented a constant threat, the RMMV *Rangitata* finally reached Auckland Harbour on 9 May 1940.

⁸⁴ Kurzke to Sargeson, undated [1977?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-4261-097. ATL.

⁸⁵ Interview with Rosamunda Droeschner, 4 December 2014.

⁸⁶ Legal memorandum re Mr Werner Droeschner, undated and unsigned. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 21. SLNSW.

PART TWO:

INVENTION AND REINVENTION

CHAPTER 3

Il miglior fabbro

3.1 Introduction

By the time Greville Texidor arrived in Auckland in 1940, the cultural nationalist project of the previous decade had lost some of its momentum. Perhaps it was inevitable that its proponents' initial fervour would diminish and their more doctrinaire convictions soften as they matured. A.R.D. Fairburn, for example, always suspicious of artificiality and abstraction in art, was even by 1936 questioning the self-consciousness of the project he had helped set in motion:

All this discussion as to how we are going to 'build up a national literature' is, of course, a little unreal. We are like a committee of scientists sitting in a circle, with test-tubes in their hands, arguing about what to put in them in order to produce a baby. (*Tomorrow*, 24 June 1936, quoted in Trussell 169)

Moreover, the outbreak of war in Europe had diverted the energies of many of the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers. Denis Glover was serving with the Royal Navy in the North Sea; Charles Brasch was working for British intelligence; James Bertram, having fought in the defence of Hong Kong, was now a Japanese prisoner of war. However enthusiastically they may have sought to establish a new cultural identity located in New Zealand's own geography and history, the Old World and its animosities had for the moment reclaimed them.

Of the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers who had remained at home, at least one was feeling increasingly constricted by the nationalist project with which he had become associated and the idiom of critical realism he had adopted to express it. Throughout the 1930s, Frank Sargeson (saved from war service by tuberculosis) had developed a literary language and narrative form that allowed him "to deal with the material of New Zealand life" (*More* 93) and with his own peculiarly conflicted sense of being both at home and an outsider in his own country. Sargeson's classic stories offered local readers a picture of New Zealand and New Zealanders that – by foregrounding the marginalised and overlooked, and excoriating conventional communal values and attitudes – felt disturbingly new, yet also utterly familiar.

But, at the very time his reputation as the “iconic forebear” of twentieth-century New Zealand fiction (O’Sullivan 1) was consolidating, Sargeson himself was at an artistic turning-point, unsatisfied by the apparent dead-end to which the last decade’s work had brought him and anxious to reinvent himself for new times. The uncertain war years filled him with a sense of urgency. As fears of a Japanese invasion took hold, he told a friend: “I feel ... that I’m living in a house of cards, and must get some jobs I want to do done quickly before the house is blown down”.⁸⁷ The immediate post-war period was no less unsettling. Even as the orthodoxies of the *Phoenix*-Caxton writers continued to be confidently asserted (in Curnow’s *Book of New Zealand Verse* and elsewhere), Newton’s “new cultural tuning” was beginning to resonate with Sargeson (Newton, “Surviving” 94). It was nourished by a range of sources, not least the émigrés and exiles – including Texidor – who had been arriving in New Zealand since the late 1930s, inflecting local culture with a cosmopolitan sensibility and the unfamiliar idiom of European modernism.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 examine the sources and consequences of Sargeson’s literary discontent, and his engagement with the changing literary landscape of the 1940s. These chapters trace the literary and personal relationships that became increasingly important throughout the period – with emerging writers, women, exiles and cosmopolitans. Texidor, whom Sargeson met in 1941, had a foothold in all these groups. Not only did the two writers’ encounter leave a palpable imprint on the work of both, but it also exemplifies many of the energies and pressures at work in this time of cultural recalibration.

3.2 A new way of writing (and reading)

It was on a Saturday afternoon in mid-1935 that Sargeson claimed to have “discovered a new way of writing” (*More* 51), a breakthrough that produced the 500-word sketch “Conversation with my Uncle”. Over the next decade, he developed and refined this bespoke, if hardly original, method, publishing some thirty sketches and stories, many in the radical journal *Tomorrow*.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Sargeson to William Plomer, 26 January 1942. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-186. ATL.

⁸⁸ Sargeson never claimed his approach was original, frequently acknowledging the influence of Sherwood Anderson, Mark Twain and other, particularly American, prose writers (see, for example, his interview with Beveridge 161). As well as *Tomorrow*, his first-period stories also appeared in *The*

While his new prose technique had the apparent economy, plainness and purposefulness of journalism, he wanted it to offer “a good deal of poetic quality. A kind of disguised poetry so to speak” (*More* 92). For Sargeson – unlike, he suggested, a more conspicuously ‘literary’ writer such as Virginia Woolf – the disguise itself was as important as the poetry:

I thought that plainer writing with a primary concern for story-telling, might at the same time imply much more than the plain representation which usually accompanied plain narrative. Or perhaps another way of putting it would be to say that what I would write might be mistaken by some readers for documentary journalism: but others would discover something of the enriching quality of Poetry. (*More* 92)⁸⁹

What was genuinely innovative was not simply Sargeson’s desire to use everyday New Zealand life as his raw material, but his conviction that this material required a new literary language. Other writers had already captured the everyday speech of New Zealand working men, notably Frank Anthony in his *Me and Gus* stories, but Sargeson’s intentions were different.⁹⁰ In his fiction, the “local and special” (Curnow, *PBNZV* 1960 17) would not simply be transmitted by the language, but would actually inhere in it. His austere vernacular and halting cadences would be charged with all the isolation, anxieties, inhibitions and inadequacies particular to his subject matter: “the European’s occupation of these islands”, a tenuous tenancy which, he thought, might “eventually be terminated” (“Writing a Novel” 55).

Disguise and subtlety were to be central to Sargeson’s method. His would be a fiction of tricks and subterfuge, of covert meanings never quite made plain and revelations never quite revealed, where sly winks would pass almost unnoticed between writer, narrator and reader. Marvels might be hinted at, but they would be concealed within the commonplace. For such fiction to work, he knew he needed discerning and engaged readers willing to peel back the deceptively plain wrapping to find the poetry within. Indeed, it could be argued that in the 1930s and early 1940s, Sargeson was preoccupied less with creating a *tradition* – despite the

Bulletin, the *New Zealand Listener* and other periodicals in New Zealand and overseas. A selection was brought together in *Conversation with my Uncle and Other Stories* (1936), followed in 1940 by another collection, *A Man and his Wife*.

⁸⁹ Sargeson’s proposal to marry plainness with poetry recalls J.M. Synge’s call for the reconciliation of “reality and richness” in early twentieth-century Irish literature. Synge wanted, according to Harry Levin, “a dialectical synthesis of the naturalistic tradition and the symbolistic reaction” and the unification of “vital theme” with “expressive medium (Levin, *Joyce* 3–5).

⁹⁰ Frank Anthony (1891–1927) originally published his comic-satiric stories about a hapless bachelor farmer and his neighbour in various popular publications in 1923–24. They reached new audiences when published as a collection in 1938 and broadcast on radio in the 1950s (T. Sturm 19–20).

“litany of origin” (Pound 6) that resonates powerfully in his autobiographical account of his 1935 discovery – than with creating an *audience*.

This self-imposed task is a feature of cultural nationalist movements worldwide, according to the most influential recent scholar of nationalism, Benedict Anderson. He argues that the nationalist writer uses the printed word to create a unified collective out of otherwise atomised or disparate individuals and groups. Supported by the technologies and processes of global capitalism, the nationalist writer thereby brings into being what Anderson calls “the embryo of the nationally imagined community” (44). But while Sargeson was committed to working with the material and idiom of New Zealand life, his ambitions extended beyond the creation of an exclusively *national* audience. If local readers were not sufficiently discriminating to appreciate his fiction, or were unwilling to learn, he was fully prepared – eager, even – to find audiences elsewhere. He energetically pursued publication in England, America, Australia and Europe, and took enormous satisfaction from the recognition his work received from fellow-writers, reviewers and publishers overseas.⁹¹ Again, we again see the internationalist wrinkle in the fabric of local literary nationalism, an enduring (and, for later myth-makers, sometimes inconvenient) cosmopolitanism that refuses to lie smooth.

Reaching and educating a New Zealand readership was nonetheless crucial to Sargeson’s project. Unless they were familiar with the work of writers such as Sherwood Anderson, Mark Twain and William Saroyan, local readers quickly realised that his “new way of writing” required a new way of reading. A single scan was seldom sufficient to fully apprehend all the intimations and insinuations which lay beneath the apparent simplicity of the prose, and which the stories’ inadequate narrators could not (and the author would not) readily disclose. The casual reader might immediately register an atmosphere of unease or dissimulation, but return visits were needed to locate the source.

This is the essential writer-reader compact that underlies Sargeson’s classic stories and continues to challenge readers into the twenty-first century. In the 1936 story “Good

⁹¹ Sargeson was always quick to pass on news of such praise to his friends. In 1942, he reported gleefully on an approach from a Houghton Mifflin editor in New York who, after reading “That Summer”, claimed to be “crazy about Sargeson. The guy can write like a fool”. He could sell his work “in a big way”, the editor claimed, but admitted to some difficulties with the vernacular: “I am still wondering what some of his words mean. Is a budgie a parrot or a monkey? And what is a cobbler [cobber]?” (Sargeson to Plomer, 17 November 1942. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-186. ATL). Above all, Sargeson cherished the letter he received from E.M. Forster in 1949, expressing admiration for *I Saw in My Dream* and disappointment at the impossibility of them ever meeting in person (see also chapter 4.3 below).

Samaritan” (*Frank Sargeson’s Stories* 35–37), for example, what Simon During calls (in respect of another Sargeson story) the narrative’s “manifest” meaning is reasonably explicit: the purportedly respectable, secularised values of which New Zealanders are so proud in fact systematically anathematise those at the bottom of the social ladder or outside the mainstream. Yet this is only part of what the story has to yield. In During’s terms, the text is constantly disrupted by “latent” meanings apparent only through a conscious strategy of over-reading – an alertness to textual details that “ordinary reading habits let slip away” (83, 79). Given his disdain for academic criticism, Sargeson would likely have resisted such analysis, but “Good Samaritan” inarguably reveals its full depths only when the reader is prepared to interrogate the gaps in the rambling anecdote Jones tells the narrator over a few beers. What is the real crime that has taken place? Who precisely is the victim and who the hero? Do our sympathies lie with Jones, who has walked past a drunken, retching seaman on the waterfront despite feeling he should help him? Or with the narrator, nominally uncomfortable at his friend’s actions but also relieved that he was not put in the same position? What of the Christian code that would once have sanctioned intervention but, in a robustly secular age, now lacks normative force? The narrator is determinedly non-committal on all such questions – throughout, he can only counsel Jones to “forget it” and have another drink – but Sargeson wants the reader to do better. The authorial voice that speaks to us over his protagonists’ heads insists we also attend to a murmured understory set in the parallel night-time world Jones describes. Appropriately located in the liminal territory of the wharves, thus demarcated from ‘official’ Auckland with its policemen and respectable parsons, this other place is dangerous and lawless – yet oddly compassionate too. We recognise Jones has a foot in both worlds: should we pause to wonder why he is still wandering round the wharves “about an hour later”, or register his anxiety at what might have happened had he “interfered”, a word whose criminal and sexual resonances are hard to ignore? After all, in the 1930s, “the Auckland waterfront was ... a recognised meeting place for male homosexuals, mainly on account of the large number of seamen coming and going from the port”, and it was where Sargeson first spotted Harry Doyle “in search of companionship” (M. King 132).⁹² As During says of “The Hole that Jack Dug”, here too we must attend not only to Jones’s tale, and not only to the narrator’s selective account of it, but also to “the story that

⁹² In his autobiography, Sargeson gives a more opaque description of the waterfront, recalling the “usual sprinkling of night people” he would see on the wharves while waiting for the Takapuna ferry – “the sort who if they remained would eventually be asked by [a] police patrol to say why they were out so late and to show what money they had in their pockets” (*More* 56).

the author implied behind the narrator writes” (79). And for the contemporary reader, informed by the biographical scholarship of Michael King, Kai Jensen and others, that implied author is now much better known than Sargeson likely foresaw at the time of writing.

Sargeson himself had a very clear sense of the compact between author and reader his fiction demanded, and that this complicity was essential to unlocking his meaning.⁹³ So too did he apprehend the power of layering multiple narratives within a single story, applying what Kipling called “three or four overlaid tints and textures, which might or might not reveal themselves” (111) to different readers at different times:

I learned to use my imagination to assist me in becoming explicit on paper, while at the same time leaving a good deal to become intelligible to the reader only upon the condition of a halfway meeting: he must not expect much from me unless he used *his* imagination. (*More* 71)

But over time, Sargeson grew frustrated at the way his early fiction was received by the reading public. Despite their purported concern with the everyday lives of ‘ordinary’ New Zealanders, his first-period stories did not find an audience among the kind of people they depicted. Writing to E.P. Dawson in 1940, he complained that while his writing was said to be proletarian, “where is the New Zealand proletarian that I would like it to be read by?”⁹⁴ This disjunction between material and audience became a source of increasing regret. When in 1945 the Progressive Publishing Society was accused of publishing work by “highbrow” literary authors that was “remote from the interests ... of the ordinary man and women”,

⁹³ The writer-reader relationship demanded by Sargeson is perhaps analogous to his relationship with his companion, the itinerant Australian and former horse-trainer Harry Doyle. Although Sargeson said Harry read little of his work – after finishing “An Affair of the Heart”, Harry declared he would read no more “because he was certain that no matter how much I wrote I would never write anything better” (*More* 62) – he can often be sensed standing behind the fiction, as character, audience and muse. To Sargeson, Harry seemed to embody both the subject matter he was intent on bringing to life and also some kind of mythic proletarian reader – untutored, unvarnished, authentic, as instinctively intelligent and compassionate as his revered Uncle Oakley. Despite Harry’s apparent lack of sophistication, Sargeson “never fell into the trap of supposing there was nothing to understand” (*More* 71); this is precisely the approach he insists his readers take to his deceptively uncomplicated stories.

⁹⁴ Sargeson to Dawson, 8 July 1940. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/001. HC. He would have been buoyed by the letter John Lehmann received from a coal miner praising “That Summer” (published in *Penguin New Writing* in 1943-44) as “A grand piece of writing – it reads easy, and I do envy that colloquial style” (Sid Chaplin, quoted in Hilliard, “Rough Architects” 144).

Sargeson knew his own work was directly implicated (Barrowman, *Popular Vision* 148–149).⁹⁵

Nor did his stories universally appeal to middlebrow readers. Many wanted not gritty realism from their fiction, but essentially benign images of a New Zealand they remembered, or an exotic projection of a country they liked to imagine. They could find either in the rollicking adventures that filled the *New Zealand Railway Magazine*, for example, or in Anthony's droll *Me and Gus* stories. There, they could see and hear themselves presented with apparent fidelity, but without the discomfiting demands of Sargeson's fiction (Wevers, "Short Story" 226, 223). After reading *A Man and his Wife* (1940), eighteen-year old Bruce Mason enthusiastically recommended Sargeson's collection to his parents: "[T]heir response to it was as numb and numbing as anything in the volume itself," Mason recalled. "'That's us?' queried my father, in baffled exasperation. ... From that day my father never read another line of New Zealand literature, not even modest mine" (243).

Some critics, too, failed to 'get' Sargeson's classic stories. They resisted the seemingly inconclusive plots, the unsavoury settings and the unappealing premise that lay behind them – namely, that "[s]omeone not very bright is going to tell us about somewhere not very nice" (Evans, *History* 185). Oliver Duff, the editor of the *New Zealand Listener*, described Sargeson as "a laureate of hoboes" and rejected his harsh social judgment as that of an outsider whose attitudes were unrepresentative: "We don't see our neighbours as morons, our young people as sensual louts, our teachers and preachers as liars and hypocrites, our patriots as profiteers" (Duff 19). Writing in *New Zealand Truth* in 1940, Pat Lawlor accused Sargeson of presenting an "impossibly brutish concept of New Zealand life" (quoted in M. King 203). To some, Sargeson's social critique seemed little more than a prurient fascination with the grotesque, the seedy and the downright disturbing in which they refused to be complicit.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Sargeson's work was published in the Progressive Publishing Society's short-lived literary journal *New Zealand New Writing* (founded in 1942). Before its financial collapse, the society also intended to publish his anthology *Speaking for Ourselves* (Barrowman, *Popular Vision* 151, 148).

⁹⁶ Although many readers have responded (enthusiastically and otherwise) to these elements in Sargeson's fiction, it is only recently that they have received critical attention – for example, in Timothy Jones's thesis "The Gothic as a Practice", which highlights the genre's distinctive intermingling of 'low-brow' conventions with 'high-brow' literary practices. Jones argues that many of Sargeson's stories and his novel *The Hangover* in particular "participate in a local Gothic" which local literary criticism has been slow to recognise and describe (2–3, 201).

But if the mainstream reading public and conservative critics were unconvinced by Sargeson's first-period stories, they nonetheless found a small but loyal following among sophisticated readers prepared to engage not only with the stories' content but also with the manner of their telling. *Tomorrow's* readership, for example, was an educated, liberal and politicised elite who inhabited an entirely different world from the characters who lived in Sargeson's stories. But by engaged, compassionate reading – and perhaps a measure of empathy – the two worlds could be bridged. To During, this “unification of the high culture implied reader and the good bloke narratee/narrator” is really the “main point” of Sargeson's classic stories (80).

Importantly, Sargeson's early stories had a profound impact on emerging writers such as Bruce Mason. Looking out from his bedroom window at “the cardboard and pinex spires” of the 1940 Centennial Exhibition then underway in Wellington, he intuited a prophetic message in Sargeson's work:

‘Look! Listen! Mark! This is all it has amounted to. Against your growth, your progress, I place these bleak and stunted lives; against the blare of self-congratulation, the tiny music of the numb and spiritless. I offer you a people sealed off by shock from all that is brave, creative and joyful.’ It was quite a shock in itself. (243)

Like Mason, other young New Zealanders found in Sargeson's stories a sense of authenticity and shared experience they had never before encountered, and which accorded perfectly with the awakening consciousness of an indigenous national culture. To R.A. Copland, raised on a diet of English fiction (“villages and copses, footmen and squires, Baker Street, the Punjab, yard-arms and keel-hauling”), here at last was a writer who had managed to “put the real world into a book” (“First Reading” 264–265). And Sargeson had done more than merely reproduce that world; he had validated it and given it literary status. Milking sheds, road gangs, the corner store and domineering mothers in floral aprons became rightful subjects for literary fiction. Voices from the woolshed or the public bar had equal claims to those emanating from drawing rooms or rustic inns. To emerging writers, this legitimisation of the local was exciting, liberating, yet strangely unsettling: “It felt very queer, like having an auntie in the First Fifteen”, remembered Copland (264).

Other admirers found in Sargeson's terse, suggestive prose a reservoir of compassionate insight and a stark beauty. His friend Jean Bartlett, formerly part of the *Phoenix* editorial team, was struck by how even the sparest of stories could “celebrat[e] joy, delight, the pure

life of the senses” (Bartlett 259–260). Aspiring poet and playwright John Graham, another long-standing friend, first encountered Sargeson by way of “Toothache”, a brief and disarmingly simple story which he came to view as “a small gem that reflects and changes light and reveals in its simple cut enormous depths” (Graham 256).

Among such readers, admiration for Sargeson’s classic stories could readily turn into imitation. *Conversation with my Uncle* “clearly and strongly stimulated” Phillip Wilson to write his first three stories, using his own version of Sargeson’s “narrating ‘I’ ... [that] appeared absolutely genuine, according to my idea of what ordinary people had said all about me in my childhood” (“Apprentice” 253). As Wilson’s comments suggest, it was Sargeson’s apparently authentic vernacular – rather than his stories’ subversiveness, their politics or his knowing use of a patently deficient language – that his imitators seized hold of. His idiom was soon widely replicated, and not only by the writers explicitly identified as his protégés and heirs (see 3.4 below). As Dennis McEldowney observes, in nearly every New Zealand short story published in the decade after *A Man and his Wife*, “quotation marks were abandoned, and along with them any sort of omniscient narration, intellectual reflection, or literary mannerism” (*Frank Sargeson* 34). A “neo-Sargeson cult” was clearly at large, wrote a sceptical reader of *New Zealand New Writing* in 1943, and its trademark was “literary parsimony” (Barrowman, *Popular Vision* 154).

Sargeson’s style was also susceptible to parody. Fairburn’s poem “Glum Summer” (Fairburn and Glover 14), published posthumously, lampoons the final scene in Sargeson’s “That Summer” (1943) where the narrator tries and fails to express his feelings for his dying friend Terry – a passage James K. Baxter praised for its “considerable liturgical power” (“Back to the Desert” 171). In “Glum Summer”, Fairburn puts this wretchedly repressed exchange into the mouths of the equally inarticulate Ron and Eth Glum of the popular radio series, gleefully stripping it of any trace of affect and power, liturgical or otherwise.⁹⁷ A later parody not only confirms Sargeson’s near-mythic stature as chief chronicler of the ‘real’ New Zealand, but also anoints the early Sargesonian story as reproducible national archetype. A.K. Grant proposes the “Ordinary Kiwi working bloke short story” as one of six foolproof templates for

⁹⁷ Fairburn was in fact responsible for several Sargeson parodies, including “Sketch-Plan for the Great New Zealand Novel” (1950) which was based on “That Summer” and *I Saw in My Dream*.

aspiring writers. Arguing that “almost any literate person can write a good New Zealand short story”, Grant offers his own Sargesonian opening:

I knew there was going to be trouble as soon as Fred, our foreman, brought Mortimer over. Mortimer looked a real nong. ‘This here is Mortimer,’ said Fred. ‘He’s a pongo, but he can’t help it.’ He walked away, rolling a smoke between his left ear and the side of his head without using his hands. None of us could work out how he did it. (“An Inquiry” 26)

Grant’s satire relies partly on the kind of under-reading that During considers has dominated New Zealand literary criticism and remains resolutely blind to the politics (class, gender, cultural) that shape both the production and reception of texts. Under-readings, During asserts, rely on an unquestioning sense of shared identity and values, the assumption that reader, writer and fictional characters all “belong to one community” (75). This assumed alignment of interests – the idea that reader and writer share a “deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7) – is an essential feature of nationalist writing, at least as Benedict Anderson understands it. To Grant, it is comic capital: like the narrator, we too can be trusted to know a nong or a pongo when we see one. But if his parody makes us laugh, it is also because we are *over*-reading Sargeson in the way During prefers. Grant’s pastiche is funny only to the extent to which we also recognise as typical the Sargesonian narrative manoeuvres it reproduces – the literariness concealed as colloquialism; the unconscious desires and dissatisfactions hidden beneath blokey codes of behaviour and speech; the misapprehensions of an inadequate narrator who is less alert to the layers of meaning embedded in his yarn than the knowing reader.⁹⁸

The challenges that Sargeson’s classic stories offered his readers were considerable and, in the New Zealand context, innovative. As Wevers has written, their incomplete “texture and surface ... initiate a process in which the reader must participate in order to ‘make sense’ of the fiction, in order, indeed, to ‘make’ the narrative” (“Short Story” 227). Moreover, she says these stories – unexpectedly for an author whose name has become a byword for critical realism – work to challenge and undermine what she calls “notions of the real” (“Short Story” 229). The artifice of Sargeson’s apparently artless realism is a recurrent critical theme, even if it went largely unnoticed by general readers. Writing in 1968, H. Winston Rhodes argued that Sargeson’s manner and method had allowed him to “creat[e] an *analogue* to

⁹⁸ Beyond parody, Russell Haley’s 1989 collection *The Transfer Station* is another late, deliberate reprise of the classic Sargesonian narrative and tone.

something indefinably New Zealand” (*New Zealand Fiction* 7, my italics). Patrick Evans makes a similar point: although purportedly representing an authentic New Zealandness, Sargeson is in fact advancing his own “strangely selective and tendentious picture of the world” (*History* 137). To During, Sargeson’s destabilisation and interrogation of the New Zealand reality is a decidedly modernist trait revealed only through “an aggressive over-reading”, and requiring the invention of a new and seemingly oxymoronic literary category – “modernist realist” (88, 85). Such critical insights challenge the orthodox classification of Sargeson as a thoroughgoing realist. Distinctly non-realist strategies are also part of his repertoire and (as 4.3 explores) he would give them fuller rein from the mid-1940s onwards.

Yet for many of those who in the 1940s read, admired and hoped to emulate Sargeson’s work, its attractions were more straightforward: familiarity, authenticity, an immersion in the local. When Janet Frame read Sargeson’s 1945 anthology *Speaking for Ourselves*, the stories “overwhelmed [her] by the fact of their belonging” – to their readers and to this country (*An Autobiography* 193). To many readers, Sargeson’s own stories elicited a similar response: an almost visceral jolt of recognition and affirmation.

3.3 The exponent of a local tradition

On the basis of his classic stories, Sargeson was declared New Zealand’s pre-eminent prose writer; to editor Oliver Duff, his tough and unromantic vision made him an incongruous but worthy heir to Mansfield.⁹⁹ He was “the exponent of a local tradition that has hitherto been inarticulate,” claimed E.H. McCormick (*Letters and Art* 182), torch-bearer of the nationalist anti-myth whose power – despite the loss of momentum brought about by the war – continued to grow and receive official sanction after 1945. His iconic status was inscribed in prestigious publications such as Dan Davin’s *New Zealand Short Stories* (1953), the first New Zealand volume to appear in Oxford University Press’s “The World’s Classics” series.¹⁰⁰ There, Sargeson and Mansfield were the only authors represented by more than one story. Davin’s introduction anointed him New Zealand’s most representative living writer,

⁹⁹ “Katherine Mansfield is dead. Before her there was no one comparable with her. Since her I am aware of no one unless we have now met him ... It is Sargeson or nobody, and I now say Sargeson”, wrote Duff in the *New Zealand Listener* (Duff 19).

¹⁰⁰ In fact, Sargeson and McCormick did much of the legwork on the anthology (see, for example, Sargeson’s letter to Gaskell, 7 July 1951, in Shieff 139).

noting “the obvious authenticity ... with which Sargeson uses the speech rhythms and the vernacular of the anonymous every-kiwi” (*New Zealand Short Stories* n.p.). Thus, decisively conflated with the nation and its people, “Sargeson’s personal fable became the assumed fable of his country” (O’Sullivan 4).

To his admirers, Sargeson himself had acquired mythic status too – clear-eyed realist, champion of the underclass and the genuine New Zealand idiom, lightning-rod for a nascent literary culture, generous yet demanding father figure to a tribe of followers. This image of Sargeson has endured in the popular imagination, but it is founded almost entirely on the stories of the 1930s and early ’40s. Despite reflecting only a small portion of a lengthy writing career, it has been reinforced in authoritative short story anthologies (including some published quite recently) that have arrested him in 1945.¹⁰¹ Thus he is represented in *Some Other Country* (1984) only by the 1945 story “The Hole that Jack Dug”, in the *Oxford Book of New Zealand Short Stories* (1992) by “A Great Day” (1937) and “Old Man’s Story” (1945), and in the *Flamingo Anthology of New Zealand Short Stories* (2000) by three stories from the 1930s plus “The Hole that Jack Dug”.

Given the scale of Sargeson’s output, such representations – whether they reflect the individual tastes of editors, their canon-creating instincts or their doubts about the quality of the later work – are undeniably restrictive. As Alex Calder has said of the poets who were Sargeson’s contemporaries, he too has been “trapped in canonical poses” in anthologies that exclude later work which “might alter the picture we have” of him (“Unsettling Settlement” 177). Ossified in the 1930s and ’40s, Sargeson remains fixed forever at the helm of the critical realist tradition he ostensibly created and of the literary nationalist project that has become the period’s defining myth. Not only does this representation fail to acknowledge his later literary evolution, it also encourages readings of the classic stories that focus primarily on their fidelity to a particular place and time. Rather than enduringly subversive manipulations of narrative and language, “experiment[s] with the medium that carr[y] [their] own message” (Evans, *History* 136), they have been treated as documentary photographs – pictures of ‘ourselves’ rather than expressions of an idiosyncratic personal vision at a particular historical moment. To Wevers’s observation that “More than that of any other writer, the work of Frank Sargeson signifies New Zealandness in our literature” (“Short

¹⁰¹ In fact, as well as two plays, ten novels/novellas and three volumes of autobiography, he published at least nine short stories after 1945; the last, “Making Father Pay”, appeared in 1975 (M. King 429–33).

Story” 222), we could add that Sargeson’s work has been assumed to signify New Zealandness more than it signifies anything else. “[W]e have required [Sargeson] to represent New Zealand literature,” argues Timothy Jones (212), and this insistence on Sargeson as a paradigmatic figure, founder and emblem of a national literary tradition, has continued to dominate and diminish readings of his work – certainly in New Zealand.

In later life, Sargeson himself expressed frustration at the relentlessly representative place which he and his early work occupied in the official account of New Zealand literature. Firstly – and I return to this point below – he recognised its adverse consequences for the next generation of writers, acknowledging in 1956 “the stranglehold which I see now I imposed on New Zealand prose with my own brand of New Zealand language” (quoted in M. King 350). Secondly, he felt artistically slighted. As a writer, he was, he told E.P. Dawson proudly in 1944, “a complicated crafty blighter ... as arty as hell beneath my plain exteriors”.¹⁰² By valuing the mimetic ‘New Zealandness’ of his work above all else, readers and critics had failed to recognise it as a highly-crafted *performance* of the ‘real’ New Zealand as he had seen and felt it, an attempt to realise what Sargeson called the “truer reality” concealed beneath the prosaic surface of the New Zealand scene.¹⁰³ Sargeson’s frustrations surfaced when the Australian writer and publisher Max Harris reviewed him unfavourably in 1945: “Do you really believe that I write ‘realism’?” he asked Harris incredulously. “And that no attitude is evoked in say, *That Summer*, *When The Wind Blows* or *The Hole that Jack Dug*. What are those stories about?”¹⁰⁴ Perhaps, as he would write of Henry Lawson, it was time for readers and critics “to forget about his being a ‘national’ writer, certainly time to cease thinking of him as a ‘realist’” (“Lawson” 125), and to focus instead on the symbolism, psychological depth, stylistic sophistication and “attitude” lodged in his (and Lawson’s) supposedly naturalistic fiction. Some readers understood this. His friend William Plomer – South African-born poet, novelist, editor and long-standing reader for Jonathan Cape¹⁰⁵ – observed Sargeson had “mastered the art of transfiguring social

¹⁰² Sargeson to Dawson, 16 February 1944. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/002. HC.

¹⁰³ Sargeson spoke of Sherwood Anderson’s ability to use words as “the thinnest of veils between the reader and a truer reality” (Sargeson to Dawson, 9 April 1943, Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/002. HC).

¹⁰⁴ Sargeson to Harris, 1 May 1946. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-198. ATL.

¹⁰⁵ William Plomer (1903-1975) first encountered Sargeson’s work in 1936, when “there reached me a small paper-covered book by him called *Conversation with my Uncle*. I read it at a sitting, and have from time to time read it again, for it has the perpetual freshness of a work of art” (152). Although Plomer and Sargeson never met, their friendship spanned four decades. Their letters, held at the

realism with irony and a wicked playfulness”.¹⁰⁶ But among local critics, Sargeson considered only E.H. McCormick understood his simulacrum of reality for what it was. He alone saw that Sargeson’s fiction was “connected with New Zealand but that it’s not attempting a realism so that people can say ‘This is New Zealand’” (Beveridge 155–156).¹⁰⁷

However, in the mid-1940s, Sargeson was arguably preoccupied less with his critical legacy than with the pragmatic realisation “that I couldn’t go on writing in this way indefinitely” (Beveridge 157). He had developed his signature idiom and form to articulate a vision of New Zealand at a very particular point in its history: New Zealand in the grip of the Depression and threatened by world war, its bullish colonial confidence diminished, its complacent puritan values worn thin and shabby, its so-called settlers profoundly unsettled by their tenuous hold on a land they hesitated to call ‘home’. Like Fairburn, Brasch and other *Phoenix-Caxton* writers in the 1930s, Sargeson’s work was sharply attuned to the physical and spiritual poverty of that particular historical moment, and it was, necessarily, meagre in texture, drab in colour and circumscribed in range. Had he now mined all that he could from this limited source? By the mid-1940s, could the “material of New Zealand life” he had drawn on so far (*More* 93) furnish anything other than a literature of irrelevancy and suffocating dullness?

Moreover, the New Zealand he had sought to fix on the page in the 1930s was changing in ways that largely puzzled and dismayed him. He told E.P. Dawson in 1942 that the “out-of-work pattern of society of which I was a part [and] the people I understand best” had begun to disappear; now, “workers go to work, or to the war, and I see around me only a dreary pretentious middle-class suburb with people I don’t understand and hence despise”.¹⁰⁸ He

Alexander Turnbull Library (see Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-186 and 0432-177), regularly express admiration for each other’s talent and productivity. They discuss topics ranging from literature to politics to gardening – Sargeson admired Plomer’s ability to cultivate quinces; Plomer envied Sargeson’s avocado tree, grown from a cutting from Paul Gauguin’s garden. Importantly, Plomer’s letters gave Sargeson a much-prized window into literary London. In 1960, Plomer reported on a lunch he hosted for E.M. Forster, then aged 81, and Leonard Woolf, aged 80; in 1964 he described his eulogy for his old friend Ian Fleming; and in 1968, he recalled his friendship with Lady Ottoline Morrell. Sargeson was delighted by these glimpses of a world that would always both entice and repel him.

¹⁰⁶ Plomer to Sargeson, 2 January 1973. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-186. ATL.

¹⁰⁷ Given Sargeson’s strained relationship with A.R.D. Fairburn (see 4.1), he may have been reluctant to recall Fairburn’s equally perceptive remark made in 1944: Sargeson’s “use of an idiom based on common speech ... is a literary device, used to express character and to define an attitude. ... The canons of realism should be applied with caution” (quoted in *New* 143).

¹⁰⁸ Sargeson to Dawson, 26 July 1942. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/001. HC.

knew that in the post-war era, New Zealand would become increasingly affluent, urbanised, educated and cosmopolitan, as open to the influences of American popular culture as to the British tradition. The expectations and tastes of his readers would change accordingly. Denis Glover, returning from the Second World War a decorated naval officer, confirmed this, telling Sargeson that “the thirties and all that was over ... in the meantime all would be new, a new generation with different interests, brushing aside the one before as having been unmasked, shown to be too ineffectual and feeble for anyone’s serious attention”. He advised his friend to “forget [he] had ever put pen to paper” and to begin anew (Sargeson, *More* 113).

3.4 The godfather-midwife: Sargeson as mentor

When in 1945 E.H. McCormick returned to New Zealand from the war, Sargeson wrote to update him on the latest literary developments and gossip. With disingenuous outrage, he complained: “[There] is a notion about that I am leading a little group that I train to write in words of one syllable. Dear oh dear, those who know me know that I am insatiably interested in a wide variety of writing” (Shieff, *Letters* 89).

Sargeson had indeed assumed the role of talent-spotter and mentor to a generation of aspiring writers. In the same letter, he identified the most promising writers who had recently begun publishing: Dan Davin,¹⁰⁹ Maurice Duggan, A.P. Gaskell (the pseudonym of Alexander Gaskell Pickard), G.R. (Garvin Robert) Gilbert, David Ballantyne and John Reece Cole. With the exception of the expatriate Davin, Sargeson was directly advising and encouraging all these young men, either in person or by letter. With a few additions – such as Roderick Finlayson, O.E. Middleton, Phillip Wilson and Dennis McEldowney – these were the writers later dubbed the ‘Sons of Sargeson’, an epithet suggesting both devoted loyalty to the man and the tradition with which he was associated, and also a certain familial ‘sameness’.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Some of Davin’s early work had appeared in student publications in the 1930s, but he did not begin publishing in earnest until the Second World War, when his stories appeared in *Penguin New Writing* and elsewhere. His first novel, *Cliffs of Fall*, was published in 1945 (Ovenden 130–31).

¹¹⁰ Michael King may have been the first to use the term “Sons of Sargeson” in print (in his 1995 biography of Sargeson), but its pedigree is considerably longer. It plays on the label given to the contemporary followers of Elizabethan poet and dramatist Ben Jonson, who were known variously as the “tribe” or “sons of Ben”. The term can also be traced to W.H. New’s study of the short story in Canada and New Zealand, *Dreams of Speech and Violence* (1987), one section of which is subtitled “Frank Sargeson & Sons, 1900–1970”.

For most of the young men who wrote to Sargeson or made their way to his bach in Esmonde Road, the mentor-protégé relationship followed a fairly consistent pattern. Seated amidst piles of books and manuscripts, the “god father-midwife” – as Sargeson described himself to Gaskell (Shieff, *Letters* 79) – would engage them in an intellectual disquisition, drawing on his own wide reading and literary contacts. Hesitantly, they would show him their work and Sargeson would respond with practical and positive encouragement: comments and corrections, advice about possible publishing outlets, tips on the craft and discipline required of the writer. He could be overweening and dogmatic, but he could also be determinedly light-handed, as Kendrick Smithyman recalled: “It was one of Frank’s principles to shun adverse criticism in case it hurt the learning writer into silence”. While Smithyman felt this approach had sometimes “promote[d] geese into swan (of whom a couple were more like stuffed ducks)”, it could also instil confidence, discipline and determination in those lacking application or self-belief (“A Sort of Poet” 300). To Duggan, however, Sargeson’s studied neutrality was sometimes a source of frustration. When Duggan found himself wavering between the colloquialism of Sargeson’s own early stories and a more ornate literary idiom of his own, his mentor refused to urge him in either direction, saying only he saw in him “a reserve of quite boundless potentialities”.¹¹¹ Duggan became increasingly exasperated by such evasions, writing to him from London in 1951, “Are you still sticking to that idea of not criticising my stories? It seems a pity – if it didn’t make me change anything it helped me see”.¹¹²

When he considered his protégés ready, Sargeson would promote their work to publishers, critics and reviewers – both local and overseas – with whom he had leverage. He insisted they read widely and critically, sharing his own enthusiasm for authors ranging from Shakespeare, Marlowe and Jonson to E.M. Forster, Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, André Gide and Marcel Proust (see Shieff, *Letters* 66, 74, 79, 107 and elsewhere). And he imbued in them a sense of writing as a socially responsible act, encouraging them to see themselves as part of a communal (and undeniably national) project in which the writer’s task was “to seek out the threads of our lives, and show us where they all lead to” (Sargeson, *Conversation* 62).

¹¹¹ Sargeson to Duggan, 13 November [1944?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-08, ATL.

¹¹² Duggan to Sargeson, 8 May 1951. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-4261-044. ATL.

Reflecting the importance of this mission, he demanded single-minded devotion to the writing life at the expense of all other distractions, especially paid work, marriage and family life. When A.P. Gaskell finally met Sargeson in person, at the 1951 New Zealand Writers Conference, Gaskell's output was already faltering. Beset with anxieties about his own abilities, aware of accusations of derivativeness, increasingly busy with his school-teaching career and soon to marry, meeting his mentor only confirmed his self-doubts. Sargeson made it clear that, like Cyril Connolly, he too considered the pram in the hall and other trappings of domestic life to be creativity-sapping "enemies of promise" (Connolly, *Enemies* 116). "He was free, sharp, shrewd, suspicious of it all," recalled Gaskell. "He himself could never marry and be the sort of writer he wanted to be" ("Christchurch" 310).¹¹³ But, in an era lacking significant literary infrastructure or state support for writers, Gaskell and many other putative 'sons' found Sargeson's exalted ideals simply impossible to reconcile with reality. Their dwindling record of publication as other commitments clamoured for their attention bears this out.

Sargeson, meanwhile, conspicuously enacted the writing life he prescribed. He could be glimpsed in the Auckland Public Library or on the respectable streets of Takapuna, equipped with "[h]aversack, tweed jacket, knitted tie – a living writer, in disguise" (Duggan, "Beginnings" 334). As a fulltime writer, he was a rarity in 1940s New Zealand – a dedicated professional at a time when probably no-one else in the country (D'Arcy Cresswell excepted) was surviving solely by imaginative writing. His unapologetic commitment to his craft and to what he saw as the moral duty of the writer came at the expense of material comforts, financial security and social acceptance.¹¹⁴ The message that the writing life involved both rigour and sacrifice was not lost on his young visitors. As Michael Morrissey observed:

To be a writer is to have a vocation which is pursued with monastic discipline and a spartan way of life. Inside [Sargeson's] house, everything relates to the craft of writing. ... Possibly his profoundest 'eccentricity' lies in the moral stance attributed to the writer. He is an individual opposed to the rich, the exploitative, the false: he tells the truth. In the deepest sense, as D.H. Lawrence wrote ... he can 'make the whole man

¹¹³ It is unclear whether Gaskell failed to notice the more obvious reason why Sargeson would "never marry", or if, like Sargeson himself, he is simply retreating behind the era's coded evasions when speaking of homosexuality.

¹¹⁴ Apart from reviewing, radio broadcasts and some family money, Sargeson's only other source of income for most of his life came from growing vegetables, although these were often bartered or given away. At one time, certain Takapuna residents made it clear to him that "there was no place in the neighbourhood for a man who was ... well known to have 'shirked doing a stroke of serious work in twenty years'," Sargeson recalled grimly (*More* 113–14).

alive tremble' ... [This writer] has a face very like Frank Sargeson's.
("Whole Man" 328)

To another "youngster in a hurry to be a writer", nineteen-year-old David Ballantyne, Sargeson was living proof "that it was not absurd, even here in dreary wartime New Zealand, to have such an ambition" ("Sargeson in 1944" 293). When Ballantyne and other aspirants passed nervously through the famous hole in the hedge and into Sargeson's primitive bach, they found not only a stimulating new world of bookish conversation, exotic vegetables and Lemora,¹¹⁵ but also a place of possibility – a place where being a writer was as normal a vocation as being an accountant or a shopkeeper, and considerably more worthy.

Sargeson was also a catalyst for networks of personal and professional relationships that developed between his protégés (the fertile exchange between Texidor and Duggan, for example, is detailed in Part Three). As their correspondence and biographical accounts show, these peer-to-peer relationships could be enduring and highly productive, sometimes even more so than the mentor-apprentice relationship from which they sprang. The apprentices could be tough on each other, providing criticism that was often more specific and harder-hitting than Sargeson's. And in some way, too, their shared responses to Sargeson helped mould their own developing literary identities, even if this ultimately meant rejecting him. Duggan, for example, told Texidor of an apparent oedipal revolt by Ballantyne, probably in 1945: "God, he somehow and quite strangely hates the '1930s school' of N.Z. writers. Fairburn, Sargeson, Findlayson [sic], etc. Hates the 'idea' of them, or something".¹¹⁶ A true father figure, Sargeson became a symbol for his protégés to resent, react against and resist, quite as much as an object of homage.¹¹⁷

Sargeson was unfailingly receptive to that homage, and flattered by it too. But he nonetheless had misgivings about the potential pitfalls of mentoring. When Duggan first wrote to him for advice in 1944, Sargeson told Dawson he was unsure how best to respond:

[S]hould I say: 'you intelligent young hound go ahead, but forget you ever read Sargeson'. ... If I get to know him will he have enough native grit bounce resilience independence to take what good he can from me & reject the bad. Or should I be an old devil & claim him if I can as an

¹¹⁵ Copious amounts of this ferocious citrus wine lubricated many North Shore social gatherings. Brewed by the Migounoff family in Matakana, it had a 27 percent alcohol content (Richards 79).

¹¹⁶ Duggan to Texidor, undated. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

¹¹⁷ These observations apply primarily to Sargeson's male protégés; the distinctive mentoring relationships he established with women are discussed in 4.2 below.

enslaved disciple, a sycophantic prop for my old age, a perpetual feeder of my pride conceit & arrogance. (Shieff, *Letters* 67–68)

He had apprehensions about mentoring Gaskell too. After reading his story “The Picture in the Paper” in the *New Zealand Listener* in 1942, Sargeson wrote to congratulate the younger writer (“you seem to me to know exactly what you are doing & do it damn well”). But he also spotted a likeness with his own work and hinted that Gaskell should aim for more than mimicry: “It looks as if you have been reading my stuff, but maybe I’m flattering myself ... I hope you do keep on & carry right on where I & others will never be able to go” (Shieff, *Letters* 49). He would make this point repeatedly over the coming decade, telling C.K. Stead in 1954: “I’m always looking for the young who will start where others left off – not start all over again” (Shieff, *Letters* 171). The frequency with which Sargeson insisted that emerging writers should develop and transform the tradition he was said to have created, not simply replicate it, suggests sincerity – but it also speaks to an awareness of his own limitations.

It was not only the risk of imitation he feared. As an avowed “puritanical anti-puritan” (quoted in L. Jones, *Picking Up the Traces* 256), Sargeson had no desire to make his protégés’ path to published glory too easy. In 1942, he sent his English publisher John Lehmann what he called a “little Maori story” by Gaskell.¹¹⁸ Lehmann apparently accepted it, a development that both pleased and troubled Sargeson. While he himself had produced his early work the hard way, “blindly and in isolation” as he told Dawson in 1942 (Shieff, *Letters* 52), here he was solicitously nursing Gaskell and other young writers: would this ruin rather than help them? Was Gaskell better left alone, as he had been, to discover for himself whether he had the resolve, discipline and talent to become a published writer? There was also the problematic effect of such well-intentioned mentoring on Sargeson’s own work. It was a time-consuming distraction, and building the confidence of others could also undermine his own: “Now I know people trying to do the same thing as myself I can’t write a bloody thing that’s any good”, he complained to E.P. Dawson in 1942 (Shieff, *Letters* 52). Again, we see Sargeson’s anxieties about his own mid-century predicament; unable to write himself out of the dead-end in which he finds himself, he envies those who are more productive.

¹¹⁸ It is uncertain what this story was: it may have been “The Picture in the Paper”, but I can find no record of it appearing in Lehmann’s *Penguin New Writing*, which is presumably where it would have been published. Nor does it seem that Lehmann ever published any other Gaskell stories (see R.A. Copland’s bibliography, in Gaskell, *All Part of the Game* 192).

Some of Sargeson's protégés shared his misgivings about the mentoring relationship. Having been conspicuously taken under the older writer's wing, Gaskell knew this made him vulnerable to accusations of slavish imitation. Indeed, he half-believed them. In 1947, his earlier stories already seemed to him "a miserable bunch of frustrated introspections, twenty years after their time"; worse, most looked "as though they were written by Sargeson anyway".¹¹⁹ Sargeson himself thought otherwise, telling Gaskell in September 1945 that while they shared "an intense interest in people ... & a powerful impulse to observe them – & sympathise", there were important differences between them:

[Y]our actual writing is freer, easier, more exuberant, looser, less strict & precise – everything in fact that makes for further development. ... I'll always be grateful to you for taking a friendly glance at Sargeson, stuck away up his blind alley ... but you move forward my friend along a broad road that leads to the most exciting country – that is if ... you're able to escape feeling & being crushed by immense desolations of solitariness, endless labour, failure, doubt. (Shieff, *Letters* 84)

But Sargeson's comments seem to reveal less about Gaskell's potential than about his own sense of stagnation in the mid-1940s, when he was yet to find the vehicle that would take him to the more "exciting country" of the novel. The "immense desolations" he projects onto Gaskell were perhaps more accurately his own.

By the mid-1940s, Sargeson's desire to write a novel was fierce. His old friend D'Arcy Cresswell declared that Sargeson had a near-messianic responsibility to produce the definitive New Zealand novel, or at least to act as midwife:

It is possibly too soon for the indigenous New Zealand novel, on the level of accomplishment on which Sargeson is now working, unless he writes it himself. The perfecting of the short story in New Zealand must inevitably produce the novel. When it comes, it will be mainly Sargeson's work whether he writes it or not. (Cresswell, "The First Wasp" 4)

Sargeson took this mission seriously. As he pushed his own fiction towards the longer form, he simultaneously transferred his hopes to various protégés he considered capable of producing what he had described to McCormick as "the masterpiece we are all hoping for" (Shieff, *Letters* 89). All would disappoint him. While initially confident that the "looseness" of Gaskell's prose "would lend itself very well to a long work" (Shieff, *Letters* 89), Gaskell had all but dried up by the end of the decade, having produced only short stories. Sargeson

¹¹⁹ Gaskell to Cole, 18 May 1957. Cole Papers, MS-Papers-4648-16. ATL.

had equally high hopes for Gilbert, telling Dawson in 1942 “he will go on writing easily and prolifically and this will be a great advance from would-be, and therefore constipated, perfectionists such as myself” (Shieff, *Letters* 53). With Sargeson’s encouragement, Gilbert began work on a novel in 1945 – a *bildungsroman* that offered, according to Lawrence Jones, “a critical picture of an anti-intellectual, conformist, female-dominated, secularised puritan small-town society, the kind of thing Sargeson wanted” (“The Wrong Bus” 34). An extract appeared in a journal, but the complete novel never found a publisher.¹²⁰ Gilbert’s allegorical and satirical novella *Glass-Sharp and Poisonous* was published by Caxton in 1952, but Sargeson described it rather contemptuously as “a sort of Kafkaesque thing about a Sanatorium”; clearly, this was not the definitive New Zealand masterpiece (M. King 237). Apart from memoirs of his lighthouse-keeping days, Gilbert published nothing more until 1986, when a self-published introduction to a massive, unpublished dystopian novel *Energy Island* appeared – again, hardly what Sargeson would have hoped for (Brandt 79–89).

With Gilbert and Gaskell both having failed to fulfil their early promise, Sargeson’s hopes rested with Ballantyne, Wilson and Duggan. The ambitious and precocious Ballantyne would eventually publish six novels. Especially in the *The Cunninghams* (1948), he demonstrated a supreme command of the critical realist mode, his prose even more unadorned and devoid of novelistic incident than his mentor’s. He conceived the local writer’s task in thoroughly Sargesonian terms, too: “to understand the way in which average people live out their time” (quoted in B. Reid 106). But in fact, Ballantyne’s meticulously austere realism did not, at this time, impress Sargeson; in his 1945 letter to McCormick, he described the young writer’s work as “fluent and rather thin. Regional, representational, and photographic” (Shieff, *Letters* 89–90). Again, he projects onto his protégé his own post-war artistic anxieties: how to represent lives and places that were marginalised, spiritually dead or simply dull, without creating similarly moribund fiction. He conceded Ballantyne’s characters were “remarkably true to life and the times” (quoted in Mercer 394). But it would take more than journalistic veracity to bring forth the kind of New Zealand novel he craved – one that was a “self-contained work of art” that transformed, rather than reproduced, local experience (Beveridge 155). As Robert Chapman wrote of *The Cunninghams* in a review for *Landfall*, the novel offered truth, but it was “an untransformed truth, accuracy at the cost of art” (“Review of

¹²⁰ This may have been the short novel Sargeson mentioned to McCormick in 1945 (Shieff, *Letters* 89): it was accepted by Australian publisher Reed and Harris, but the company’s collapse in 1946 meant it was never published.

DB” 185). Such judgments appeared to be confirmed by Ballantyne’s slide into near-obscure during the 1950s and ’60s. That slide halted with the publication of *Sydney Bridge Upside Down* (1968), which Sargeson hailed as “the one that I’ve been waiting for” (L. Jones, “The Wrong Bus” 41). Here, Harry Baird’s coming-of-age in small-town New Zealand – the dependable trope of mid-century critical realism – is utterly destabilised by Ballantyne’s deployment of elements of fantasy, horror, the gothic and the surreal. It is an unequivocal, if belated, demonstration of his ability to reimagine the New Zealand reality by transcending the austere naturalism Sargeson was finding so limiting by the mid-1940s.¹²¹

Phillip Wilson, meanwhile, remained a good friend and full of promise, but seemed to be standing still creatively: his first collection did not appear until 1960, when its “considerable debt to Sargeson” was immediately noted (Notley 290). As for Duggan, his instincts were taking him away from realism, away from explicit representations of New Zealand and, eventually, away from the novel altogether. Although he professed to be working on longer fiction throughout the 1950s and into the ’60s, he was interested less in expansiveness than in the intense, sustained amplification of a small moment or detail. Describing the process of writing a novel “so much neat and usual carving of old dead mutton and old dead horse, from right to left, from beginning to end, plots and chronologies”, Duggan’s real aim, he told Ballantyne, was to produce just “one small and perfect thing” (in L. Jones, “The Wrong Bus” 32).

If, as Jones asserts, Sargeson was bitterly disappointed that none of these protégés produced the definitive New Zealand novel, perhaps he was looking in the wrong place. As noted in Part One, Jane Mander’s *The Story of a New Zealand River* (1920) had already staked a claim of sorts, if not to greatness then at least to worthiness (Calder, “Defiance” 98–99). The astonishingly prolific Robin Hyde had published no fewer than five novels between 1936 and 1938, yet Sargeson’s antipathy to Hyde and her poetry probably clouded his judgment of her novels.¹²² As we shall see, Texidor wrote two short novels virtually under Sargeson’s nose in the 1940s and was tackling another much longer work about the Spanish Civil War when she

¹²¹ Despite Sargeson’s enthusiasm, *Sydney Bridge* was resoundingly ignored in New Zealand until its posthumous republications (in 1981 and 2010) attracted a new readership and overdue acclaim.

¹²² Writing to Glover in 1937 (and doubtless choosing his language accordingly) Sargeson described Hyde as a “silly bitch” and her poems “a sort of orgasm in 3 stanzas” (Shieff, *Letters* 14). He was no more impressed by her novel *Passport to Hell* (1936) – a mere “write-up” in which Hyde had failed to inject any “profound & tragic significance” into the experiences she described. “And the bad prose!” (Shieff, *Letters* 12).

left New Zealand in 1949; she would go on to write at least one more novel in Australia. However, her status as an outsider – while undeniably central to her attraction – seems also to have disqualified her from producing a ‘New Zealand’ novel, just as the expatriate Mansfield’s “suspension” disbarred her from the local tradition (Sargeson, “Katherine Mansfield” 32). Even if Texidor was not a candidate in Sargeson’s eyes, there would soon be another equally close to home: Janet Frame who, after her two-year stay in the old army hut in Sargeson’s garden, began publishing the novels which assured her local and international stature. Yet neither woman seems to have figured in Sargeson’s mind as creators – past or future – of the eagerly-anticipated national masterpiece, a theme I return to in 4.2 below.

By the 1950s, Ballantyne had left New Zealand and was finding it increasingly hard to get published. Gaskell, Gilbert and Cole had largely abandoned fiction in the face of family and career responsibilities. To the new generation of writers and critics intent on repudiating the dominant Sargeson tradition, this high attrition rate was evidence of his deleterious influence. Maurice Shadbolt – whose first published story was pseudonymously savaged by Sargeson in 1955, and thus had no reason to be well-disposed – referred to the “mafia of mediocrities” who surrounded this “vain, preening and rather paranoid man”, eager acolytes “who put down anyone likely to menace his standing” (Shadbolt 192). To Shadbolt and others, it was bad enough that Sargeson had ‘picked winners’, promoting writers who sounded like him in order to shape mid-century fiction in his own image. It was even worse to find that those he nurtured were little more than ventriloquists, their talent confined to mimicking the atmosphere, attitudes and idiom of Sargeson’s signature stories. Sargeson’s ‘sons’ were a reactionary force, it was argued, recycling representations of a New Zealand that, even by the late 1940s and certainly by the 1950s, had moved on. O.E. Middleton’s 1964 collection situated him in “a tradition which was fashionable twenty years ago and is not now” (McEldowney, “Review” 67); Ballantyne’s *The Cunninghams* was symptomatic of “a literature of deficiency” that even Sargeson himself had left behind, “the end-point of a genre rather than a new means of exploration”, wrote a reviewer (Arvidson 70). Because, as Lawrence Jones writes of Gaskell, the ‘sons’ had “mastered the Sargeson and related traditions just about the time when they were becoming irrelevant to contemporary New Zealand” (“Out from Under” 95), it was little surprise that they had fallen into silence and obscurity, critics argued.

Or was Sargeson guilty less of picking winners than of knowingly backing losers? Consider Frame and Duggan, arguably the two most successful writers he supported. Both produced substantial, evolving bodies of work over long careers. Yet both chose to work outside the critical realist tradition, and both conspicuously shook off Sargeson's attempts to mould their fiction (Frame's response to his interventions is detailed further in 4.2). Finding himself unable to influence the most talented writers of the next generation, did Sargeson consciously nurture lesser talents instead? And did he do so not only because they were more receptive, but because they were never likely to fulfil his hopes or threaten his own preeminence? If anyone was to write the definitive New Zealand novel, it would not be Gilbert or Gaskell or Cole: it would be Sargeson himself.

It is perhaps fairer to appraise Sargeson's mentoring in terms of the cultural politics and economic conditions of the time. State-funded cultural institutions and funding mechanisms were in their infancy; publishing opportunities for literary fiction were limited; there were no creative writing courses, scholarships or residencies; no writers' festivals. It is hardly surprising that aspiring writers might look to the country's only professional imaginative writer for guidance and encouragement, however opinionated, forceful and doctrinaire; nor that Sargeson chose to give it.

Looking back on his mentoring role, Sargeson expressed regret. When he turned fifty in 1953, sixteen of his fellow-writers proclaimed him a "liberating influence" (Ballantyne et al., "A Letter" 5). But he described himself, along with Mansfield, as one of the "two tragedies in New Zealand literature", a dominating presence who had unwittingly encouraged imitation rather than enabling talent. Some of his protégés had mistaken the world of his stories not only for reality itself, he concluded, but for the *only* New Zealand reality – and one that could only be written about as he had done. Instead of "opening up something for New Zealand", he had managed to shut down its literary possibilities (Beveridge 153–154).

CHAPTER 4

Frank and Greville

4.1 The beautiful Texidor

At the same time that Sargeson's circle was expanding to accommodate a growing retinue of protégés, some of the crucial personal and professional relationships he had forged in the preceding decade were unravelling. As Newton has observed, Sargeson's membership of the aggressively masculine and misogynist "gang" revolving around Fairburn and Glover had always been precarious, requiring a vigilant strategy of concealment and over-compensation.¹²³ His place in their circle was now becoming unsustainable. Glover reacted violently against the homoerotic undercurrent of "That Summer" (1943-44) and refused to publish it; he was equally vitriolic about the "cunning little red herrings" and "sniggering shithouse humour" he detected in Sargeson's next excursion into long-form fiction, *I Saw in My Dream* (1949) (Newton, "Surviving" 87-88). More irrevocable was Sargeson's split with Fairburn during this period. Nominally, disagreement over the merits of state patronage was the catalyst, but Fairburn's homophobia and his conviction that a "Green International" was working behind the scenes to promote the interests of homosexual writers like Sargeson undoubtedly played a part (Trussell 249).¹²⁴

Sargeson still greatly admired the work of Glover and Fairburn, holding an "almost religious reverence" for Glover's lyrical verse in particular (M. King 318). But increasingly, as he set about the difficult task of artistic reinvention, his most important and sustaining literary

¹²³ Seen, for example, in the derisive but also camouflaging comments about homosexual and women writers that Sargeson saved especially for his correspondence with Glover. His remarks about Hyde have already been noted (see p104). He applied Glover's sniggering description of Anna Kavan ("one of those blondes who get round the world with their knees behind their ears") to Texidor, telling Glover in February 1943 that "[y]ou'll be delighted to meet her, the knees inclined to be behind the ears, Kavan-like, certainly, but the attitude different" (Shieff, *Letters* 44, 57). Such comments reveal the extent of the "elaborate 'passing' strategies" Sargeson employed in an effort to remain part of Glover's macho literary gang (Newton, "Surviving" 86) – similar strategies, in fact, to the cunning games he plays in his fiction to simultaneously express and conceal his own "closeted sexuality" (Jensen 124).

¹²⁴ This belief drove Fairburn to resign as vice-president of PEN in 1952. In his resignation letter, he wrote: "If a precedent comes to be established, we shall find that the granting of pensions tends to favour the homosexuals (who have no economic responsibilities, and thus can be provided for more cheaply) at the expense of the heterosexuals. ... I can foresee a certain distortion of the literary tradition as a result" (quoted in Trussell 249-50).

relationships would lie elsewhere. As this chapter attests, many were with women (including Texidor, E.P. Dawson, Christine Cole Catley and, soon, Janet Frame); with the assorted refugees, émigrés and nomads he had befriended during the war years; and with his London contacts, especially Lehmann and Plomer. Another key relationship, particularly after the establishment of *Landfall* in 1947, was with Charles Brasch. Like Plomer – whose “quality and purpose as a writer”, *The Times* wrote, “derived largely from never having been rooted in one place” (“Obituary” 16) – Brasch was a cosmopolitan with a distinctly exilic sensibility. As noted in Part One, he had allegiances to multiple communities beyond the national, including the Jewish diaspora and the Otago intelligentsia. He was also, like Lehmann and Plomer, homosexual. As Newton remarks, Brasch’s aestheticism, international outlook and mandarin sensibility made him the perfect audience for Sargeson’s evolving literary strategies (“Surviving” 92).¹²⁵

Greville Texidor too would prove an ideal reader for the writer Sargeson sought to become in the post-war world – a looser, freer, more inventive writer with recourse to a broader range of narrative tools, subjects and forms. Yet in Sargeson’s 1945 letter to McCormick, her name appeared almost as an afterthought to the list of bright young men he considered the country’s most promising writers. “The beautiful Texidor”, he commented, is “quite an acquisition to this country” (Shieff, *Letters* 90). This parenthetical, yet clearly admiring, acknowledgement registers Sargeson’s nuanced and ambivalent attitude to the woman and her work. Her instinctive literary talent impressed him, but he was equally besotted by her glamour and sophistication. Although her foreignness and gender seems to have exempted her from his conception of the national literary project, he nonetheless accorded her a place in the literary life of the nation. He regarded her as an unformed writer in need of discipline and nurture, yet he greatly respected her literary judgment.¹²⁶ Moreover, he allowed Texidor, and the cosmopolitan and modernist sensibilities that informed her writing, to stimulate his artistic reinvention.

¹²⁵ For more on Brasch’s “exilic temper”, see also Harding 71–73.

¹²⁶ Amply demonstrated in his correspondence with the young Duggan in 1944–45. When commenting on Duggan’s drafts, Sargeson regularly bracketed his own responses with Texidor’s: “Dear Maurice, I’m getting Greville etc. to read the typescript before I send it to you, but meantime I’m writing this off my own bat” is typical (Sargeson to Duggan, 3 July 1944. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-08. ATL).

They first met, briefly, in Takapuna in mid-1941, a year after Texidor and Droescher had arrived in Auckland. Greville had found work in a shirt factory and was once again modelling for artists to supplement her earnings. Werner was labouring for Sargeson's friend Len Salter (Smithyman, introduction 11).¹²⁷ Sargeson found them "an exceedingly nice couple, very intelligent".¹²⁸ In fact the entire Texidor-Droescher household, which also included Greville's daughter Cristina and mother Editha (née Prideaux), was a source of fascination:

[The] Prideaus are so old that their ancestors lie on the top of their tombs in Cornwall with their feet crossed ... [This] one is 76 & looks not more than 56 ... She has 2 daughters by the way who apparently reacted away from the stone ancestors [and] ... couldn't keep theirs crossed. [They] won beauty contests, became Folies [Bergère] girls, married Spaniards, Arabs etc – not to mention those they didn't marry ... [They] have dragged Mother all over the world chasing after men. The only remark mother has ever been known to make was that she hoped all these affairs were Platonic. The daughter's nice too and can write.¹²⁹

A promising friendship seemed in the offing, but soon after this meeting, Greville and Werner were ordered to leave Auckland. Werner's nationality meant he and Greville were subject to the Aliens Emergency Regulations, which came into force in October 1940 as an attempt "to sort out potential fifth columnists from the rest of the resident aliens in New Zealand" (Beaglehole, "Refugees" 31). They were required to register with the police, they could not live in certain places deemed sensitive (for example, where they might observe troop movements), they were banned from contributing to the war effort, and unable to own items ranging from cameras to X-ray equipment. Unpleasant and petty as these restrictions were, Werner was at least fortunate to avoid internment, a fate that had already befallen Sargeson's young German refugee friend Odo Strewe (Sargeson to Lehmann, 22 January 1941, in Shieff, *Letters* 41).

The Quakers again provided Texidor and her family with a lifeline. An elderly Quaker farmer, Josiah Hames, offered Werner work on his farm at Paparoa, an isolated settlement north of the Kaipara Harbour. Conditions were basic: the rudimentary farm cottage had no

¹²⁷ Len and his redoubtable wife Gladys were, among other things, the Takapuna storekeepers. Sargeson sometimes helped out in their shop during this period.

¹²⁸ Sargeson to Dawson, 16 July 1941. Dawson, *Letters*, MS-2404/001. HC.

¹²⁹ Sargeson to Dawson, 12 August 1942. Dawson, *Letters*, MS-2404/001. HC. His reference to "2 daughters" acknowledges Greville's sister Kate, who lived in England during the war but visited New Zealand soon after. She returned to Auckland for a period in the 1970s.

electricity and a limited water supply, and the family sometimes had to bathe and wash their clothes in a nearby stream.¹³⁰ One former resident, who lived in the area shortly before Greville arrived, considered that “anyone with the life experience of Texidor, who had lived in civilised countries ... and travelled to New York and Paris, would have found this farming area ‘dreadful and primitive’” (quoted in Hulse 97).

But it was in this uncongenial setting that the friendship between Texidor and Sargeson began in earnest, and it was here that Texidor’s writing life began. Sargeson made a spur-of-the-moment visit while travelling home after staying with his friend Dr George Smith at Rawene. When the train reached Paparoa, where he recalled “the refugee people” he had recently met were living, he impulsively jumped off and made the long walk to the Hames’s farm. There, he again encountered:

the remarkable (not to say remarkably beautiful) woman who was to become known to discriminating New Zealand readers as Greville Texidor. ... How I wished that [Augustus] John could have been there that day to paint her again – bare-footed, with a kind of smock covering sub-ample proportions. Her manner was enchantingly friendly (how well she knew her dark eyes were not just for seeing with!). (*Never* 60–61)

Texidor gave him a tour of the cottage. With amusement, she told him that the local policeman had hidden outside in the bushes one night in case she or Werner should decide to signal to enemy craft at sea: instead, the officer had received “an excellent view of a lovely woman taking off her clothes as she went to bed”. Then Sargeson became reacquainted with Cristina (“home from school, dark-eyed ... and as bright lovely and intelligent as they come”) and Werner, who arrived on a motorbike with the milk billy handle “securely held in his excellent German teeth”:

A large man, ‘Aryan’, yet a good deal more dark than fair, he was smiling and communicative, the most open-natured of the trio. Clearly too he was a good deal younger than his wife, and proud to be the husband of a very beautiful woman. (*Never* 61)

Over an excellent dinner, they talked about the present war, the Civil War in Spain, and the possibility of establishing a kind of commune or artist’s colony in Northland (an idea that Sargeson flirted with intermittently throughout the 1940s). In his memoirs, Sargeson does not recall any discussion of writing. But it seems highly probable that in the rundown farm

¹³⁰ The family occupied two cottages in their time in Paparoa, the second only slightly more salubrious than the first (interview with Cristina Patterson Texidor, 22 April 2015).

cottage, or in the tent that Werner erected for her in the garden, Texidor had already begun to write her first short stories. Cristina remembers her mother busy at her typewriter during this period, the tent wreathed in smoke as she worked her way through pack after pack of cigarettes.¹³¹

It is impossible to determine exactly where Texidor's impulse to start writing fiction came from: no diaries or letters remain that shed light on her motivation. It seems certain she had never done so before coming to New Zealand. However, she was extremely well-read, in several languages. She had mixed with writers in England and Europe, kept a journal in her youth, written propaganda for the Republican cause in Spain and, with Werner, composed biographical portraits of the evacuee children they cared for at Cantonigròs (Droescher 19). But this writing had been "hack work for the cause of humanity", she said: now, in New Zealand, she was starting out "on a cause of my own".¹³²

In his obituary for Texidor, Sargeson speculates that, adrift in the alien backwater of Paparoa, writing fiction became a surrogate for the intense and sometimes visceral existence she had left behind in Europe:

[F]inding herself unable to establish with this country relations which could be in any degree thought of as a serious love-affair, she substituted literary endeavour for the many-sided involvement of day-to-day living which had been her habit in environments that appealed to her as more congenial.
(*Never* 63)

However, the course her writing took suggests it was impelled by something beyond a simple desire to occupy herself, or even to re-experience the colour and intensity of her former life.

As I explore in Part Three, Texidor's experiences in the Spanish war rapidly became the engine that drove her fiction. Spain – her affinity with it, her estrangement from it, her sense of having failed it – was the source to which she repeatedly returned. Over time, writing became less a creative act than a tool that, with increasing doggedness, she used to excavate the past and seek expiation for an array of personal and collective failures. It would be an over-simplification to say that a sense of guilt compelled Texidor into fiction, but it undoubtedly animated much of it – and perhaps ultimately curtailed it too.

¹³¹ Interview with Cristina Patterson Texidor, 22 April 2015.

¹³² Texidor to Duggan, undated [1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

Whatever the initial impetus, Texidor's writing was certainly helped by the time and solitude Paparoa offered. She was on her own for much of the day while Werner worked on the farm and Cristina was at school. Gladys Salter, who lived in the area before moving to Takapuna, considered Texidor would not have found Paparoa uniformly uncongenial. The local storekeepers, the Crowleys, "had an interest in the left and humanitarian causes"; they operated a lending library and had run a Workers' Educational Association (WEA) left book club in the 1930s.¹³³ There were occasional talks by visitors such as Auckland University College Professor of English Arthur Sewell, who travelled to Paparoa as part of a WEA lecture series. The Crowleys and their social and political idealism appear to have inspired Texidor's bleak story "You Have to Stand Up to Them", where "all those [locals] who didn't want to get in a rut" attend a talk by a visiting "progressive professor" which concludes with a ragged singing of the Internationale (*Fifteen Minutes* 152).

But, notwithstanding any connections she may have established with the Crowleys, Texidor clearly remained an oddity in Paparoa in ways both large and small. Her decision to paint the floors of the family's cottage bright blue, reminding her of the Mediterranean, briefly became a local talking point,¹³⁴ while the local schoolteacher remembered her as

Bohemian and more brittle than the typical New Zealander, meaning that she was a socially unconventional person, used to a travelled, freer life. She was a very striking woman with beautiful bearing and nearing forty. Driescher and Texidor showed their affection in public, something not usual in a country district of this nature. (quoted in Hulse 98)

Cristina recalls her mother's occasional efforts to get to know other women in the district. According to social convention, this meant visiting one another's homes for morning or afternoon teas. Social success thus depended heavily on demonstrable baking talents, which Greville lacked as much as suitable small-talk. So embarrassed was Cristina by the unconventional bran muffins her mother produced for such occasions that she would fling them into a gully on her way to school, rather than reveal the contents of her lunchbox to her friends.¹³⁵

¹³³ Reminiscences of Gladys Salter. MS. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198. University of Auckland Library.

¹³⁴ Interview with Cristina Patterson Texidor, 22 April 2015.

¹³⁵ Interview with Cristina Patterson Texidor, 30 April 2015.

After seven months in Paparoa, the family was permitted to return to Auckland. They moved to a house in East Coast Road on the North Shore, just a few miles from Sargeson's home. They were still required to report regularly to the police, but Werner could work. Sargeson reported he was "involved in Len's [Salter's] plans for land settlement & a chicken farm is in the idea-stage just at present"; Werner also began studying for a B.A. at Auckland University College.¹³⁶ Texidor – who had by now completed several stories, and may even have begun writing her (unfinished) Spanish Civil War novel – fully immersed herself in writing, drawing on the reserve of observations, memories and imagery accumulated during her exile in Northland, as well as her life in Europe.

She soon found company, stimulation and discipline in her association with Sargeson and others who formed the nucleus of the growing North Shore artistic community – R.A.K. Mason, Maurice Duggan, Ian Hamilton, Anna Kavan and John Reece Cole among them. Soon, members of "what some came to think of as the North Shore Group" began to gather regularly at the Texidor-Droesch home (M. King 250). Sometimes, these social occasions got out of hand. Greville's infamous encounter with a drunken Denis Glover at a party features in many accounts of the period: "Denis across the kitchen table from Greville offered some opinions on the conduct of the war in Spain, 'Too many of the Republican side fought with their fountain pens and not enough with their rifles ...'". Greville responded by brandishing a carving knife, and fisticuffs ensued: according to Sargeson, the fists were not the pugilistic Glover's but Greville's (M. King 279).

Among Sargeson's other protégés, Texidor became close to Cole, an ex-fighter pilot studying journalism and writing fiction in his spare time. When he was first taken to visit Sargeson, Cole was put at ease by Sargeson's account of his morning spent bottling tomatoes with "La Texidor" (Cole, "Letters" 261). Sargeson soon engineered a meeting between the two novice writers, and Cole became a regular visitor to the Texidor-Droesch home: he later lived in a caravan on their property.¹³⁷ Another significant relationship was with Duggan. Just twenty-

¹³⁶ Sargeson to Dawson, 26 March 1943. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/002. HC. In another letter to Dawson that year, Sargeson reported Werner was also working on some fiction and was "beginning to write nicely" (Shieff, *Letters* 55). It was not Werner's first foray into fiction: he had written a novel in Spain in the early 1930s, and retrieved the abandoned manuscript when he returned to Tossa de Mar twenty years later (Cleary, introduction 4). Not long after arriving in New Zealand, his Spanish Civil War story "Epilogue" was published in *Book* (No. 5, February 1942). And, with Duggan, he later published a non-fiction piece about jazz rebutting A.R.D Fairburn's criticism of the genre ("Fairburn's Bogey", in *Music-ho: Owen Jensen's music news-letter*, 4.3, Jan-Feb 1946).

¹³⁷ Texidor to Cole, 3 April 1946 [?]. Cole Papers, MS-Papers-4648-17. ATL.

one years old when they met and desperate to establish himself as a writer under Sargeson's guidance, Duggan found the exotic Texidor extraordinarily attractive, even if her obvious frustrations with life in New Zealand had left her "brittle and inventively sardonic". Duggan was smitten, altogether exhilarated by the chance to discuss literature and politics with Texidor and her "dazzling and excitable" household (Richards 63). They may have had a brief sexual liaison, but mostly they seem to have shared books, read Spanish poetry and exchanged manuscripts – initially via Sargeson, but increasingly independently of him also. In fact, Texidor was the first to read (and instantly admire) Duggan's Lorca-influenced story "Man Alone", a usurpation which clearly annoyed Sargeson (Richards 72). The Texidor-Duggan relationship seemed to sour somewhat at a personal level when Duggan met his future wife Barbara – Ian Richards says Texidor was jealous, while Barbara was wary of Greville's "penchant for malicious indiscretion" (86) – but, as I shall explore more fully in Part Three, it remained key to the development of both as writers.

However, it was Sargeson who was the crucial driver and enabler of Texidor's emergence as a published writer, particularly between 1943 and 1945. As Lydia Wevers writes, "it seems clear that Texidor would never have become a writer without him and that, in encouraging her to write, he not only uncovered astonishing talent but enabled her to survive the translation from Europe" ("Always Outside" 76).

4.2 Daughter of Sargeson?

Sargeson was hands-on and prescriptive in his mentoring of Texidor, more so than with some of his other protégés. He applied himself to the task with great seriousness and urged her to do likewise, demanding rigorous "standards of excellence" (*Never* 63).¹³⁸ Unfortunately, little direct documentary evidence of the mentoring process has survived: Texidor's habit of burning her papers before moving on means no drafts annotated by Sargeson remain, and there is little detailed critique in their surviving correspondence. But the recollections of

¹³⁸ Texidor's spelling was notoriously poor; even when she had left New Zealand, Sargeson would take the time to fastidiously correct work she sent him for possible publication. Her former brother-in-law Sherry Mangan performed a similar role, once admonishing her: "They may have taught you to think and feel and write delightful prose at Cheltenham, but oh my dear they certainly didn't emphasize such elementary matters as spelling and punctuation (or perhaps they did, and yours is the product of a revolt against same)" (10 April 1956. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1 Folder 2. UA).

others attest to the thoroughness of Sargeson's attentions, and Texidor's responsiveness. According to her younger daughter Rosamunda Droescher, Sargeson sat literally at her mother's shoulder while she wrote, coaxing her fiction into life, sentence by sentence. "[Greville] had the stories," recalled Rosamunda, "and Frank made her write them down".¹³⁹ He even gave her paper, in short supply in 1940s New Zealand, and several of her stories from this period are typed on the familiar green paper, sometimes even on the back of Sargeson's own drafts.

Almost certainly, Sargeson was drawn initially to her accounts of pre-war Spain, seduced (as Duggan admitted to being) by "the allure of a distant land".¹⁴⁰ Moreover her war stories, informed by first-hand experience, gave concrete form to the hazy contest of ideologies that he and other *Phoenix*-Caxton writers had tried to engage with, at a distance, in the 1930s. Reading stories such as "At Home and Alone" or "Reconstruction" was a chance for Sargeson to experience, by proxy, what had already been immortalised as the last great war of ideals.

But it was soon apparent to Sargeson that Texidor offered more than exoticism. She showed a capacity for accurate observation, a powerful visual imagination and a keen "ear for New Zealand speech" (Sargeson, "Greville Texidor" 136). Why, then, should she not set herself to deal with "the material of New Zealand life" that lay around her in Paparoa, using the distinctively New Zealand idiom that sprang from it? ("Writing a Novel" 54). Alone among the exilic writers he knew (Wolfskehl, Kavan, Strewe), Texidor was made into a *New Zealand* writer by Sargeson, long before Smithyman anointed her one in his introduction to the collected stories: "insofar as [she] is a writer, she is a New Zealand writer" (introduction 8). Her evocations of "the Spain she loved so much" would continue to delight and impress Sargeson, but he urged her also to mine material from "the New Zealand ... for which she felt almost no love at all" ("Greville Texidor" 136). "Elegy", "Home Front", "Anyone Home?" and "An Annual Affair" were among the results (see chapter 6).

Once Texidor had a working draft, Sargeson would critique it closely, identifying technical problems and suggesting solutions. In his autobiography, he recalls finding the first version of "An Annual Affair" (1944) marred by the narrator's unconvincingly sophisticated voice:

¹³⁹ Interview with Rosamunda Droescher, 17 March 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Duggan to Texidor, undated. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

[I]t immediately struck me as unfortunate that she had written in the first person, using for her narrator a young country girl ... It seemed to me that the various and difficult problems of first person narration had not been solved, hence much excellent material had not been fully realized ... I think I unkindly said, "Look, you make it appear that this girl must keep a copy of Chekov in the cowshed – which she reads instead of doing her share of the milking". (*Never* 63)

It was not long before Texidor had produced another version in which the painful comedy of the community picnic is presented through free indirect discourse, a sophisticated authorial voice now mediating Joy's suitably guileless and partial impressions. Writing decades later, Sargeson predicted "An Annual Affair" would be remembered as "her most beautiful piece of New Zealand writing" (*Never* 63).

Sargeson acknowledged Texidor's talent, but was adamant it was his robust mentoring methods that made her into a writer:

No doubt it would be rash on my part to say that without my encouragement, my suggestions and proddings, not to say occasional scornings, and even downright condemnings, Greville Texidor would never have become a name to add to the list of distinguished literary people who have visited our country. (*Never* 62)

Texidor agreed.¹⁴¹ After leaving New Zealand for Australia in 1948, she wrote to him regretfully: "I haven't written any more stories lately. Probably because you are not there to run your pencil through it or whatever you did. Anyway it worked".¹⁴² Later, she acknowledged that the loss of Sargeson's attentiveness and counsel had effectively terminated her career as a writer, at least a published one: "The sad truth is that since you gave up being responsible for it I have never written another thing. Rather I have but I'm never satisfied with them – [I] write several drafts and then chuck in the sponge".¹⁴³

Indeed, Texidor published nothing more after leaving New Zealand apart from a handful of translations and two radio plays. Seemingly, this places her alongside Gilbert, Gaskell, Cole and other Sargeson protégés who showed early promise but fell into premature silence and

¹⁴¹ Although she shared Sargeson's view of his centrality to her literary development, her recollections were far from nostalgic. In a 1951 letter to Duggan, she depicts Sargeson less as a kindly mentor than an egotistical bully: she reports "our one and only Frank" has recently asked her "if you ever have time to remember that without me Greville you never would have been worth a damn?". Texidor to Duggan, 21 September 1951. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

¹⁴² Texidor to Sargeson, 14 July [1950?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-182. ATL.

¹⁴³ Texidor to Sargeson, 16 June [1950?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-182. ATL.

obscurity. But there are arguably more differences than similarities between Texidor and Sargeson's 'sons'. First, she was considerably older – a year older than Sargeson himself, in fact. That she was not a New Zealander but a foreign “acquisition” also set her apart (Shieff, *Letters* 90). Texidor never contemplated settling in New Zealand long-term, writing in 1950: “I really think anyone would be an ass to stay there if they could get away”.¹⁴⁴ So while willing to observe, dissect and damn her new environment in fiction, she had no obligation to the all-important project of creating a national literature. She was bored by New Zealand's bland parochialism – she once wrote that “being brought up in N.Z. is the worst preparation for the struggle to live”¹⁴⁵ – and her wartime experiences had left her deeply wary of schematic nationalism. Sargeson may well have found this indifference to the nationalist project, and her detachment from its claims, pleasantly liberating. She offered him respite from the responsibility of being New Zealand's foremost living author, creator and sentinel of a literary tradition, and from the burden of urging earnest young men to “seek out the threads of our lives” (Sargeson, *Conversation* 62). Effectively, Texidor allowed him to be the writer that, by the mid-1940s, he wanted to be: a writer valued not simply for representing ‘New Zealandness’ but as a “complicated crafty blighter” with a full repertoire of non-realist techniques and idioms.¹⁴⁶

Moreover, Texidor offered Sargeson a new way of connecting with the European tradition. As a young man in England, he had tried, and failed, to make himself a place there. Yet the tradition still furnished his cultural frame of reference: Janet Frame remembered him showing her postcards of his travels in Europe with “such a look of wild longing, almost of agony at what was gone, that I felt near to tears” (249). And, as I have noted in Part One, recognition by the arbiters of literary taste in London remained Sargeson's gold standard. Yet the European tradition could also fill him with a sense of inadequacy and even revulsion. On his travels, he recalled feeling crushed by the “intolerable weight of civilization”, by the Old World's inescapable odour of staleness and decay (*Once* 115). Similar feelings resurfaced in the 1940s when he met the German-Jewish refugee poet Karl Wolfskehl. Initially enamoured with this extraordinary literary giant – “intercourse with him is so damned attractive I'm losing my grip. I'm degenerating into a second-rate European”, he told Glover in 1943

¹⁴⁴ Texidor to Duggan, 28 August 1950. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

¹⁴⁵ Texidor to Duggan, 26 January [1953?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

¹⁴⁶ Sargeson to Dawson, 16 February 1944. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/002. HC.

(Shieff, *Letters* 58) – Sargeson later abruptly withdrew his friendship, “overpowered, weighed down by so much civilisation; a feeling which I had often and keenly experienced during my time in England, and when I had walked in continental cities and towns and through countryside which had been cultivated for many hundreds of years” (*More* 111).

Yet now, with Texidor, Sargeson seemed to suffer no such misgivings. Perhaps it was simply that she was not so insistently ‘European’ as Wolfskehl: she may have been an enemy alien, but with her tweed suits and public school education, she looked and sounded like a well-born Englishwoman from “the upper reaches of the English middle-class” (Sargeson, *Never* 61). Moreover, the German poet was the living relict of Old Europe, an extinguished world; indeed, Thomas Mann had called him the “last European man” (quoted in *More* 105). His fin de siècle literary connections with the likes of Stefan George and Hugo von Hoffmanstahl would have made him an anachronism in post-war Germany, let alone in 1940s New Zealand. By contrast, the spirited and adventurous Texidor was the epitome of European modernity – politically engaged, financially independent, twice divorced, a former drug addict. Her literary and political connections were enviably ‘modern’ too. She had rubbed shoulders with Lawrence, Hemingway and other European modernists; she had been in Spain with Ralph Bates, Humphrey Slater and Tom Wintringham;¹⁴⁷ she had talked art with Georges Kars and music with George Gershwin. Through Texidor, Sargeson could access an updated version of the sophisticated European sensibility and cultural tradition he had once sought for himself, and towards which he still harboured such complicated feelings.¹⁴⁸

Perhaps, too, the particularly contingent and casual nature of Texidor’s itinerancy struck a chord with Sargeson. William Plomer’s description of Nick the Dalmatian in “The Making of a New Zealander” (1939) seems to fit Texidor rather well too: “*dépaysé, déraciné*, a bit lost and muddled” (“Some Books” 153). Hers was not the tragic irreparable exile forced on Wolfskehl and other refugees, but what has been called a kind of casual “homelooseness” (Wood 6) born of habit and circumstance. Sargeson may well have recognised this sensibility in himself. His classic stories attest to his familiarity with the colonial predicament: “the

¹⁴⁷ All were British writers who went to Spain as communists to fight with the International Brigades. They are best known for their novels, journalism and poetry of the 1930s and ’40s, and Slater was also a well-regarded painter. Before the Civil War, Ralph Bates lived near Tossa de Mar and Texidor’s account of meeting Frances Hodgkins there refers to him helping with the renovation of Casa Sans (MS. MSS & Archives A-198, Box 2, Folder 8. UA).

¹⁴⁸ Despite being “so very much a N.Z.er,” Sargeson told Duggan in February 1945, he still “suffer[ed] badly from a European hangover” (Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-08, ATL).

whole tragedy of the colonist who has not taken and perhaps cannot take root” as Plomer, another displaced colonial, once described it (153). Sargeson was also acutely aware that his vocation, not to mention his undeclared sexual orientation, made him an isolated oddity in mid-century provincial New Zealand (Beveridge 164), one of the “beleaguered few” setting their faces against “the persecuting many” (O’Sullivan 1). In Texidor’s rootlessness lay an echo of his own marginality, and a reminder that it could be both a burden and an artistic asset.

But what distinguished Texidor most from the other writers Sargeson mentored in the 1940s was of course her gender. Much has been written about Sargeson’s attitudes to women, his literary representations of them, and how his own sexual orientation – known to many, but never discussed (see Stead, “Fifty Years Ago” 12) – may have contributed to both. It is a subject warranting fuller consideration than is possible in this thesis. However, it must be noted that Sargeson’s relationships with Texidor and other women in the 1940s (Jean Bartlett, E.P. Dawson and Una Platts among them) were both significant and riddled with contradictions. On the one hand, his correspondence, his autobiography and the memoirs of others confirm that these were among his most valued relationships. So too were the slightly later friendships he forged with Cristina Texidor and the young architectural student Renate Prince, with the publisher Christine Cole Catley, and with Frame. But the same sources also suggest that he could never forget that they *were* women, whose sexuality both intrigued and repelled him. He could certainly play the gallant with his female friends. But his gallantry had a cruelly misogynist streak, as Frame observed: “In all his conversation there was a vein of distrust, at times hatred, of women as a species distinct from men ... I listened uneasily, unhappily, for I was a woman and he was speaking of my kind” (*An Autobiography* 249). G.R. Gilbert’s wife Joy recalled in 1999 the particular delight Sargeson took in goading Texidor, Kavan and other women in his circle:

They would say deeply philosophical things and then he'd question them a little bit, as if to make them prove what they were saying ... I think he was being very naughty. ... In the end the woman would ... get terribly heated and start bursting out crying ... and Frank would think he'd won. He was very difficult like that. (Brandt 6; all ellipses in original, apart from the second.)

If Sargeson enjoyed the company of women, as Jean Bartlett believed (M. King 304), he also registered and measured their differences (intellectual, psychological, emotional and physical) from his male associates. To the extent that Sargeson belonged to any tribe, it was a

male tribe. Its members might be diverse in sensibility – they ranged from his Uncle Oakley and Harry Doyle, to Fairburn and Glover, to D’Arcy Cresswell, Lehmann, Plomer and Brasch – but it was unyieldingly exclusive. While women could visit, they could not belong.

The attitudes to women that surfaced in Sargeson’s personal relationships are manifest equally in his writing. As has been well-documented by Kai Jensen and others, the vision of reality affirmed in his fiction is overwhelmingly masculine. Heather Murray bluntly calls it “anti-female” (129). In the stories, ‘New Zealandness’ finds its fullest expression in the free and unconstrained lives of working men (labourers, wharfies, shearers); arrayed against them is the life-sapping world of women – puritanical harridans like Mrs Crump (“The Making of a New Zealander”), pretentious snobs like Mrs Parker (“The Hole that Jack Dug”) and their variants. Indeed, the sublimated yearning for “an entirely male world” was a defining trope in the kind of colonial fiction Sargeson considered an exemplary model for New Zealand writers (“Ralph Boldrewood” 45). Even as female characters and sensibilities become more visible in his work from the mid-1940s onwards, they still perform functions that are chiefly peripheral or instrumental. With a few exceptions (notably Katherine Sheppard in *I For One...*), they are overbearing mothers, dissatisfied wives, objects of lust, hyper-sexualised predators or grotesques. Even once the local reality that interests Sargeson has diversified and matured, and more sophisticated narrative strategies are deployed to represent it, women are chiefly located at the margins of the scene or as disruptive elements within it.

Believing that the ‘real’ New Zealand was ineluctably male, Sargeson was perhaps simply unable to conceive that a woman writer could ever bring it to fictional life without falsifying or trivialising it. Mansfield had her moments of excellence, he conceded, but by choosing expatriation she had detached herself “from any sense of social tradition”. Moreover, she had worked in “the *feminine* tradition” which, he emphasised, was inescapably “*minor*” (“Katherine Mansfield” 29, 32).¹⁴⁹ Her abiding concern was with “the part rather the whole”, when the New Zealand writer should be seeking to represent and recreate the whole, the New Zealand scene itself (“Katherine Mansfield” 29; “Writing a Novel” 61). With Mansfield as their standard-bearer, it was thus impossible that women writers would ever occupy anything other than a marginal position in Sargeson’s conception of the national literary project – at

¹⁴⁹ Sargeson’s attitude to Mansfield is, however, more nuanced than this judgment suggests. Elsewhere, for example, he acknowledges his own *I For One ...* is itself in the “feminine tradition” (Shieff, *Letters* 107).

least until he read Janet Frame's early stories in 1952, and conceded their "piercing flavour of anguish and suffering" could derive from nowhere but "the New Zealanders themselves" (Sargeson, "Janet Frame" 66).

Despite the very different trajectories of their writing careers – and notwithstanding Frame's firm rejection of Sargeson's attempt to mentor her in the way he did Texidor¹⁵⁰ – Frame and Duggan are Texidor's closest kin within Sargeson's literary family. Certainly, the kinship between Frame and Texidor can be understood in gendered terms, but the affinities are more complex. Sargeson undoubtedly viewed them differently from the 'sons'. Both mature women with opaque and complicated pasts, they were less malleable than the earnest and awestruck young men who gathered at his feet at Esmonde Road. And, over time, he apprehended the extent to which their literary inclinations diverged from his own. Texidor could certainly 'do' Sargesonian realism when required but her interests lay elsewhere, as Part Three makes clear. Writing to Duggan, probably in 1944, she described getting a "lecture from Frank" about the dangers of "false gods, Kafka etc. And how much better is good old Huck Finn". But Twain was not an appealing model: possibly Sargeson was right, she wrote, "but I am not the Huck Finn type so what can one do about it?"¹⁵¹ Like Frame and Duggan, Texidor instead became increasingly interested in what W.H. New calls "animat[ing] the independent life of language on the page" (160). While the more imitative of the 'sons' continued to recycle the vocabulary of early Sargesonian critical realism, these writers were investigating non-realist modes of writing – symbolism, impressionism, myth.¹⁵² As I demonstrate in 4.3, Sargeson too was experimenting with such techniques, but even in his more expansive fiction of the late 1940s, he was still deeply entrenched in critical realism, still "refus[ing] to write about a world that isn't there" (Evans, *History* 189). The gap between Sargeson's apparent realism and the alternative modes that attracted his three protégées is dramatised by Patrick Evans in his novel *Gifted* (2010). His fictional Sargeson insists that the artist must "find a way of writing about what is around us so that those who come next don't have to do it, so that they may have what we never had, the beginnings of a

¹⁵⁰ Early in their friendship, Frame showed Sargeson a draft of her story "An Electric Blanket" but was so disappointed by his pedantic and unsympathetic response, "I resolved not to show him more stories, and I kept my resolve, later showing him only the beginning of my novel" (*An Autobiography* 249).

¹⁵¹ Texidor to Duggan, undated [1944?]. Duggan Papers MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

¹⁵² The later Ballantyne could also be included here. With the publication of *Sydney Bridge Upside Down*, he had declared his commitment to "genre-mixing" and to "non-realist modes in an attempt to mythologize the local", argues Erin Mercer (397–98).

local tradition to work in.” To this, the fictional Frame responds: “You speak as if words are little donkeys that go out and bring back a load of facts for us ... Then we build a world from them that ends up looking like the world the facts came out of in the first place. What’s the point of that –?” (*Gifted* 53).

Texidor and Frame also shared the privilege of creative freedom. Sargeson never seems to have saddled them with the same expectations as his ‘sons’: he did not look to them for the great New Zealand novel, and he did not regard them as heirs who would “carry right on where I & others will never be able to go” (Shieff, *Letters* 49). Potentially, this freed them to succeed in ways that the ‘sons’ could never do. If so, it is fair to say that, unlike Frame, Texidor never fully realised the opportunity – a point I will return to in Part Three.

4.3 Towards reinvention

I have earlier outlined why, by the mid-1940s, Sargeson was beginning to chafe at the constraints of the tradition with which he had become indelibly associated, and the burdens of mentoring. I now want to briefly examine Sargeson’s response, both artistic and personal, to those frustrations. Although his literary reinvention did not really gain momentum until the mid-1960s, it began in the 1940s when his relationship with Texidor was at its most intense and productive: that period is the focus of this section.

Sargeson’s shift away from the tightly compressed narratives, pointed morality and deliberately restricted idiom of the 1930s was hard-fought. It began with the more discursive stories written towards the end of that decade and in the early 1940s, in which he sought to “use more words and presuppose a slightly higher level of intelligence”.¹⁵³ The results of these self-declared “fresh experiments in style”¹⁵⁴ include “The Making of a New Zealander” (1939), ““Gods Live in Woods”” (1943), “Letter to a Friend” (1944), “Old Man’s Story” (1945), “The Hole that Jack Dug” (1945) and the slowly-gestating “That Summer”.¹⁵⁵ All show signs of a more elevated literary idiom, increasing opaqueness and more nuanced

¹⁵³ Sargeson to Dawson, 5 November 1943. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/002. HC.

¹⁵⁴ Sargeson to Dawson, 27 October 1943. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/002. HC.

¹⁵⁵ Sargeson began work on “That Summer” in 1938, but it was not published until 1943-44.

polemics. More than ever, he is working like a painter who curates and re-assembles the material world, rather than a photographer who merely documents it.¹⁵⁶ The stories' geographical and cultural horizons begin to widen. The tragi-comic "An Englishwoman Abroad" (1939) was Sargeson's first – and only – story to be set outside New Zealand; elsewhere, urban and suburban life starts to figure more prominently. The free indirect speech of the earlier stories grows even freer and more fluid, with Sargeson switching between detachment and intimacy to force his characters to new levels of self-betrayal and exposure that also uncomfortably implicate the reader. "[I]s it, maybe, that my notions about the problem of evil are far too much tainted by my puritan upbringing?" muses the narrator of "Letter to a Friend" (1944), before prodding the narratee (and the reader) into similar self-scrutiny: "I leave this question for you to decide" (*Frank Sargeson's Stories* 217).

Possessing greater self-awareness, expressiveness and capacity for growth than their predecessors, such protagonists cannot be mistaken for 'types' or ciphers for national personality traits – even when, as in "The Making of a New Zealander", the 'national personality' is Sargeson's central concern. The story is very much a product of its specific historical and personal moment. At the time it was written, Sargeson's contact with the exilic and refugee community was growing. He saw friends like Wolfskehl, Strewe and Haydn (and, soon, Texidor and Droescher) deeply and sometimes unhappily engaged in the act of self-invention his title describes, their experiences problematising the already-contested question of what a New Zealander was and how one might be made. The title also ironically echoes the platitudinous rhetoric of the country's 1940 Centennial celebrations, an occasion dedicated to idealising the colonial project and its legacies. By contrast, "The Making of a New Zealander" is an indictment of Mrs Crump, the narrator's employer, and her kind – the paradigmatic New Zealanders the colonial project has been 'making' for the past hundred years. Sargeson has rehearsed their signature characteristics in many earlier stories: the lack of compassion, the materialism, the unquestioning veneration of hard work. But, here, he treats them with a new delicacy and obliquity. The coming-together of the farmhand narrator and the Dalmatian migrant Nick, a brief moment on a hillside at sunset shared by two lonely

¹⁵⁶ Sargeson's understanding of this distinction is revealed in a letter to Duggan (9 June 1944) where he suggests the younger writer's work is still "more the work of a man with a camera than a man with a paint brush. ... [Y]ou don't quite know what to do with and what to make of your material, so you just photograph it" (Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-08. ATL). In fact, though, when it came to his own way of working, Sargeson told Lionel Grindlay in 1945 he considered himself more a musician than a painter (Shieff, *Letters* 87).

men who know “it’s all wrong”, sits at the story’s heart – a fleeting revelation of Anderson-like “truer reality”, charged with sadness and the kind of immanent poetry Sargeson always wanted his prose to yield (*Frank Sargeson’s Stories* 107). The moment’s power is generated at least in part by the collision of worlds it enacts. In Nick’s exilic sensibility – weary with the rottenness of the Old World, unable to truly take root in the New – the narrator recognises his own estrangement from the values and attitudes of his community.

The results of Sargeson’s experimentation during this period were mixed. Working on a larger canvas undoubtedly exposed the constraints of the material, technique and form he had made his own. These constraints became even more problematic when he set his sights on producing a novel. His two early efforts had failed: the “dismal dull and lifeless” autobiographical novel begun and abandoned during his brief time in London (*Once* 115), and the Galsworthian *Blind Alleys* that Jonathan Cape had considered publishing in 1930 (McEldowney, *Frank Sargeson* 19–20). This time, his goal was a novel that would represent and critique “the New Zealand scene” (“Writing a Novel” 61) and, at the same time, transfigure it through his now well-practised ‘painterly’ narrative strategies. But was his raw material sufficiently fertile for this undertaking – or was he, as Dan Davin would wonder after meeting him in 1948, “hemmed in by too small, too provincial, a neighbourhood?” (Davin, “Three Encounters” 306). Could his stripped-down and concentrated prose with its habitual ellipses and silences, its sly hints and glances, deliver the richness, scope and substance the longer form required?

Sargeson’s three attempts at a novel during the 1940s were only partly successful. The first, “That Summer” (1943), took him four years to write. Set in the Depression, it was to be “a simple story of the slump ... show[ing] two men, a young man and an older man, caught by it” – and caught also by what Sargeson called the “terrifying, wonderful, beautiful” workings of the human heart.¹⁵⁷ Yet this familiar material proved unexpectedly intractable. It was hard “to sustain the colloquial technique over 100 pages of typescript without it sagging too badly now and then,” he told E.P. Dawson.¹⁵⁸ Although he considered the end product better than anything he had written before, he was “disappointed and disturbed ... not to have written to a somewhat larger scale” (*More* 96). Others seemed to agree, and were reluctant to treat “That Summer” as the full-scale novel Sargeson had originally conceived. John Lehmann

¹⁵⁷ Sargeson to Dawson, 8 July 1940 and 22 March 1942. Dawson, MS-2404/001. HC.

¹⁵⁸ Sargeson to Dawson, 8 July 1941. Dawson, MS-2404/001. HC.

first published it in serialised form in *Penguin New Writing*, whose wide wartime circulation almost certainly gave it a larger readership than any of Sargeson's other work (McEldowney, *Frank Sargeson* 35). It was published again by Lehmann in 1946, this time as the centrepiece of an eponymous short story collection. Writing in *Landfall*, Robert Chapman firmly rejected any suggestion it was a novel, calling it "not a very long short story" that was essentially "episodic, a clothes line of incident" ("Review of *That Summer*" 220).¹⁵⁹

By then, Sargeson was already hard at work on a novella, *When the Wind Blows* (1945), which he originally envisaged as "a sort of colonial *Ulysses*" but later downgraded to "a sort of *Portrait of the Artist*" (quoted in M. King 254, 259). Like the first of Joyce's novels, *When the Wind Blows* chronicles the growth of its protagonist towards independent fulfilment, free of the constraints of family, religion and repressive morality. Henry Griffiths's struggle inescapably recalls Sargeson's own quest to escape the "Methodist Little Bethel" of Hamilton (McEldowney, *Frank Sargeson* 37). While it was generally well-received, again it was regarded more as a succession of sketches than a fully-realised novel. Baxter, for example, claimed Sargeson "has not yet shown he can write a full-length novel" and lacked the "staying-power" to do so; the latest effort was "undeveloped, the ostensible theme too mechanical, the deeper currents too vaguely indicated" ("Back to the Desert" 171, 176, 172). Writing from Australia, publisher John Reed (of Reed and Harris) observed that Sargeson's "rather 'flat' treatment" of his material created "a certain degree of monotony".¹⁶⁰

There were similar reservations about Sargeson's next novel *I Saw in My Dream* (1949), of which *When the Wind Blows* became the first part. In the second part, Henry has been reborn as Dave Spencer and is working on the McGregors' isolated farm. He again confronts isolation and puritanism, albeit in different forms to those which damaged his younger life. Down the road, at the aptly-named "Waiaamahea", Sargeson depicts the local Māori families – with their easy humour, uncomplicated sexuality, parties and dancing – as enviably liberated primitives, unconstrained by the rigid conventions of their European neighbours (even if, in the case of the consumptive Rangī, they are doomed by their diseases). These characters serve primarily to convince Henry/Dave that a freer, more sensual life can be lived in his own

¹⁵⁹ The contemporaneous reviews, and Sargeson's own description of "That Summer" as a "simple story", were challenged by later reviewers, beginning with H. Winston Rhodes. In his 1969 study, Rhodes characterises it as a sophisticated examination of loneliness, mateship and love whose deceptively complicated narrative structure "belies its apparently picaresque form" (*Frank Sargeson* 82).

¹⁶⁰ Reed to Sargeson, 7 August 1945. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-198. ATL.

country; they represent another version of the alternative New Zealand that Sargeson himself once apprehended while travelling through the King Country (*Once* 47–48). Throughout the novel's second part, Henry/Dave's hesitant progress towards rebirth shadows that of the McGregors' vanished son Cedric, who may have found his own escape in the mysterious cave – or perhaps another prison. An arbitrary and violent act of nature sees Henry/Dave return to an uncertain future in the city, yet the novel ends with an emphatic and Joycean affirmation of individuality, freedom and possibility:

Yes.

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

yes

YES. (ISIMD 269)

In *I Saw in My Dream*, as in *When the Wind Blows*, it is Sargeson's narrative method rather than his plotting or characterisation that is most consciously experimental. The impressionistic prose is an assemblage of literary fragments (drawn from Bunyan, Shakespeare, Hardy, nursery rhymes and more), powerful naturalistic evocations of landscape, snatches of dialogue that draw on a new range of New Zealand idioms (alongside the familiar vernacular of Johnny, Bert and Jack, Sargeson introduces the very different voices of Mrs Anderson's witty, educated city friends) and passages of interior monologue. Signalled rather intrusively with italics, these passages represent Sargeson's most committed excursion into modernist narrative methods so far, an attempt to render on the page the restless, circular, often incoherent processes of Henry/Dave's troubled mind:

why am I oh why am I here in the cold and the dark? Cold bed rolling
over to the sun, cold embryo waiting to be born. Why am I waiamihea

...

waiami oh yes why am I where I am, here where only the maori, no
shepherdess oh no. Perdito I, declining hic. What is hic to the hick? But
there is always horum. Plus ça change. (ISIMD 85–86)

Sargeson laboured hard and long over the novel, telling Dawson that despite keeping his nose “very close to the grindstone”, his output was painfully slow: “I average a page about every four hours”.¹⁶¹ Again, the book's reception was mixed, especially in the heavyweight British

¹⁶¹ Sargeson to Dawson, 3 October 1946. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/003. HC.

press. Lehmann and his sister Rosamond (co-director of his publishing firm) had already weighed in after reading the manuscript, identifying “grave weaknesses”. They had particular reservations about the central character whom they considered “so much a cypher that one begins to wonder what the real meaning of the book is”.¹⁶² Lehmann was also lukewarm about the stylistic experiments, despite Sargeson’s detailed explanations of the literary allusions submerged within the stream-of-consciousness passages. In an undated letter, Lehmann wrote bluntly: “I will be Philistine enough to say that I don’t care two hoots whether there are concealed meanings in [the italicised passages] referring to *The Winter’s Tale* or *Ulysses* or what you will, if the basic necessities of story and character are not supplied”.¹⁶³

But other reactions from abroad exceeded expectations. There was the treasured note from E.M. Forster praising, much to Sargeson’s satisfaction, not his fidelity to the New Zealand scene nor the acuity of his social critique, but his artistry. *I Saw in My Dream* was “extraordinarily haunting”, wrote Forster. “The strong-room, Marge’s W.C. and Cedric’s cave are the same and not the same; they set the imagination, not the intellect, going; they cannot be patted into a symbol”.¹⁶⁴ Plomer too was enthusiastic: “oh, but you have fixed something that nobody has done before”, he declared. “People living in two or three kinds of isolation at the same time bubble & boil under the dancing lid of Protestant convention so that the uncageable Cecil is for me a pot that boiled over”.¹⁶⁵ In Ireland, much to Sargeson’s glee, the novel was banned as a “threat to faith and morals” (M. King 302).

But again, local reviewers and readers remained unimpressed. Many found the two parts poorly integrated (the protagonist’s change of name was frequently cited as problematic) and the novel as a whole simply too episodic to cohere. Among Sargeson’s protégés, Cole and Duggan both wrote appreciate reviews, as did Davin in the British press.¹⁶⁶ But Texidor’s (unpublished) comments were decidedly lukewarm – and characteristically incisive. Her

¹⁶² Lehmann to Sargeson, 27 May 1948. Frank Sargeson Collection, MS-Papers-0432-191. ATL.

¹⁶³ Lehmann to Sargeson, undated. Frank Sargeson Collection, MS-Papers-0432-191. ATL.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Sargeson to Dawson, 29 December 1949. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/003. HC.

¹⁶⁵ Plomer to Sargeson, 2 December 1949. Frank Sargeson Collection, MS-Papers-0432-177. ATL.

¹⁶⁶ Davin’s review allowed Sargeson to feel “I may comfortably sit back among the colonial immortals now (along with Whitman Twain Schreiner Lawson Hawthorne and a few others – with of course my feet on Katherine Mansfield for a footstool)”. Sargeson to Texidor, 13 November [1949?]. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1, Folder 2. UA.

concerns about the second part cut right to the heart of Sargeson's insecurities about his literary strategies, particularly his self-confessed "artiness". In a letter written from Australia, probably in 1950, Texidor charges him with "writing down to your characters by spinning subtleties about them which they ... are really quite unable to carry off. [M]ost of the points you make are so much beyond [the characters] that you have to do a fair amount of winking behind their backs to someone [i.e. a reader] who is probably overseas".¹⁶⁷ Texidor was even more disparaging in a letter to Duggan. If the italicised excursions into Henry/Dave's subconscious were an attempt to bring unity to the novel's disparate parts, she wrote, they had singularly failed:

I do find it quite extraordinary that anyone who can write can't find some way of sticking a novel together. The rifts which had appeared in the first part now crack wide open as yawning failures in imagination. It's this unfortunate interior monologue which is meant to be the solution but is not used. It might be a watch tower for the writer to which he can climb right out of the story. It might be an xray showing up the things the character could not be aware of. It might merely be a means of making known what inarticulates cannot themselves express. But surely these meagre musings on life and Marge could just as easily have been confided while handing over the second bar of soap to friend Johnny.¹⁶⁸

Texidor's dissatisfaction was echoed by *Landfall*'s reviewer Laurence Baigent, who considered isolated scenes "masterly pieces of vivid and economical statement" and individual characters "instantly and convincingly alive"; but, as a novel, it was "a failure" (159, 158). At issue was Sargeson's abbreviated characterisation – "As a thinking, suffering human being [Henry/David] scarcely exists" (158) – and, echoing Sargeson's own misgivings, the colloquial style that had served him so well until now. Deployed here in the longer form,

the deliberate stringing on of sentences, the long, loose chains of 'Ands', and 'Buts' and 'Wells', dissipates rather than concentrates the reader's attention. The style lacks tension, and ... produces in the long run a lax, enervating effect. (159)

¹⁶⁷ Texidor to Sargeson, undated [1950?]. Frank Sargeson Collection, MS-Papers-0432-182. ATL.

¹⁶⁸ Texidor to Duggan, undated [1950?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL. Another egregious "slip up", she said, was Mr Anderson searching for his wife's nightdress in a farm shed: "No young women with pretensions to smartness ever keep their best nighties in sheds unless they have just moved in and are not unpacked. This sort of thing right through blunts the whole business".

According to Baigent, the novel demonstrated clearly that Sargeson's talent "does not lie in that direction" (158). He was not alone in wondering whether Sargeson was capable of making the transition from the short story to the novel.

The challenge of proving otherwise would occupy Sargeson well into the 1950s and early 1960s. His familiar struggles with productivity continued as he made painstaking progress on a new work he called his "little diary novel" (quoted in M. King 301). This was *I For One ...*, which anatomises the stifled life of school-teacher Katherine Sheppard. It was the first time Sargeson had sustained a female narrative voice and viewpoint at such length, a voice that was quietly eloquent and unapologetically middle-class.¹⁶⁹ This obvious act of ventriloquism allowed him to graphically demonstrate the flexibility and sophistication of his narrative powers, qualities he felt readers of his earlier fiction had overlooked in their enthusiasm for its local authenticity. *I For One ...* is a performance, and the demonstrable artificiality of Sargeson's narrative stance might have prompted thoughtful readers to revisit his classic stories: were they too performances? Had he all along been *adopting* the idiom and persona of the 'real' New Zealander rather than, as McEldowney opines, "speaking with one natural voice as most had supposed" (*Frank Sargeson* 44)? However, *I For One ...* was destined to be one of Sargeson's least-read works, largely because it once more fell uneasily between the two stools of the short story and the novel. It appeared in its entirety in *Landfall* in 1952, but was not published in standalone form until 1956 (though dated 1954); together with the novellas *A Game of Hide and Seek* and *Man of England Now*, it was reissued as a single volume in 1972.

Apart from *I For One ...* and his excursions into drama and (more successfully) autobiography, this was a barren period for Sargeson in terms of publication. Periodically, he toyed with writing another novel with independent female protagonists. It was to be "about 2 young girls", he told E.P. Dawson towards the end of 1952, "both career women, but very different, one with a talent for living with men, the other with a talent for architecture". His

¹⁶⁹ Sargeson based Katherine on his longtime friend Una Platts, with "just a few dashes of Peter [E.P.] Dawson" (Sargeson to Dawson, 3 September 1948. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/003. HC). Una Platts was a teacher, artist and writer who lived near Sargeson in Takapuna. He once wrote that "if I wasn't a thorough cad [Una] is the girl I should marry (though possibly a few glandular and/or psychological anomalies constitute further impediments)" (quoted in M. King 305). In the novel, Sargeson also made use of one of Texidor's witticisms about their mutual friend Molly Macalister, attributing it to Katherine (Richards 166).

“models” were his young friends Cristina Texidor and Renate Prince.¹⁷⁰ However, there is no record of him ever starting work on this project; he may well have lost interest in it once both young women (separately) departed New Zealand for Europe.

As a novelist, Sargeson did not finally hit his stride until *Memoirs of a Peon*. The novel’s publication in 1965 (it had been completed some five years earlier; see Shieff 279) marked the start of a remarkable late-career resurgence. Picaresque, playful, apparently contingent in their structure and plotting, these later fictions brim over with exuberant language, grotesqueries, sexual adventure and dark comedy. Like the cities and suburbs in which they frequently take place, they are densely and eclectically populated, featuring often outrageously grandiloquent characters – Michael Newhouse in *Memoirs of a Peon*, the monstrous Reverend Bohun in *Joy of the Worm*.

R.A. Copland has remarked that after *Memoirs of a Peon*, “[Sargeson’s] work could take virtually no direction that seemed surprising: to so great a distance did his grand manner carry him from the New Zealand here-and-now that any new move would bring him nearer home” (*Frank Sargeson* 35). In fact, it could be argued that the “here-and-now” continues to exert a powerful pressure on Sargeson’s later fiction: it is simply a far more diverse, urban, cosmopolitan and confident here-and-now than the uniform social landscape Sargeson had dealt with thirty years earlier. His fiction still imparted “a strong feeling of N.Z.,” wrote Plomer in 1969, “but in a perfectly new way”.¹⁷¹ The same year, Charles Brasch – still clearly reading Sargeson as a nationalist writer above all – found “a fresh and novel New Zealand” and New Zealanders “who are in no way off the peg” in his new work, commenting that he was “dead sick of the stock old New Zealand of too many writers”.¹⁷²

But the more significant departure in the later work is from the lean, sparse register he had earlier used “to enact [the] ‘unhistoric story’” that had constituted Pākehā New Zealand life in the 1930s (New 144). Rather than using a deliberately impoverished idiom to represent this particular version of local reality, he now seeks to imaginatively transfigure the real through a different but equally artificial idiom, dense and highly-wrought. His diction grows ever more orotund and extravagant. The sentences lengthen and their structure becomes more elaborate,

¹⁷⁰ Sargeson to Dawson, 24 November 1952. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/003. HC.

¹⁷¹ Plomer to Sargeson, 12 August 1969. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-177. ATL.

¹⁷² Brasch to Sargeson, 22 September 1969. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-149. ATL.

although never uncontrolled. Even though Sargeson had abandoned his fledgling legal career decades earlier, the imprint of his legal training can be seen in the dense compound and periodic sentences that abound in *Memoirs of a Peon*, for example. “But it was not until I had joined the ladies, and linked my pacifying endeavours with those of Mrs Ritchie before persuading Mrs Greenbatch to return to her premises, that I draw my accurate conclusions from the phenomena I had observed” is typical of the idiom used by the syntactically proper but sexually voracious protagonist, Michael Newhouse (*Memoirs* 192).¹⁷³ This is fiction that speaks directly and unapologetically to an educated, sophisticated and literary reader who knows Shakespeare and Webster and, according to Sargeson, “is able to appreciate sentences – what they’re up to, what they’re doing, how they’re written” (Beveridge 159).

Thus, whereas in “An Affair of the Heart” (1936) Freddy Coleman struggles towards the halting admission that he “sort of understood the way Mrs Crawley felt towards [her son] might turn out to be quite a terrible thing” (*Frank Sargeson’s Stories* 60), Maisie Michie in *Joy of the Worm* (1969) is all metaphysical eloquence as she muses on the fragility of human existence while contemplating her sewing:

the little area that human beings emerged into for their few years of human consciousness – before they merged again with the limitless surrounding night, the great outside where human consciousness located marvels and terrors far beyond the capacity of the human spirit to endure. (*Joy* 94)

Between these passages lies not simply three decades, but also a striking narrative enlargement. The feminine, the domestic, the intellectual, the eccentric and the articulate – indeed, all the forces that are feared, mocked and resisted in the world of Sargeson’s early stories – have now invaded and transformed his fiction, just as they had his personal world. As W.H. New suggests, this is new fiction for new times:

[B]y the 1960s speech rather than silence had become the norm, for other writers as well as Sargeson. ... [His] later characters are less dislocated by their own idiosyncrasies, more comfortable with the masks that their own language allows them to wear. They grow, as it were, into their own fragmentation. (145)

New argues that this willingness to “[free] the forms of local discourse” and explore the “potential for suppleness” in the language is the supreme achievement of Sargeson’s late

¹⁷³ Sargeson’s friend William Bakewell – a bank manager with an impressive storehouse of bawdy tales and a “comically sumptuous” turn of phrase – was the inspiration behind *Memoirs* (Never 82-88).

career (146). If so, it signals an affinity with other writers he mentored or supported but who largely eschewed the critical realist tradition, notably Frame, Duggan and even Texidor. Their determination to explore non-realist modes of writing shows that faithful imitation was not the only possible response to Sargeson and his work, despite the alleged dominance of the so-called “neo-Sargeson cult”. Some developing writers chose instead to repurpose, react against, repudiate or simply sidestep the Sargeson model. The development of Sargeson’s prose also suggests that the flow of ideas and influences between Sargeson-as-mentor and his various protégés had not been entirely one-way. It is possible to speculate that Sargeson’s later fiction bears the imprint of Duggan’s lush wordplay, for example, or of Texidor’s intense pictorial imagery and renderings of fractured psychological states. However, such claims are difficult to demonstrate. All that can be said with certainty is that Duggan and Texidor, and Sargeson’s intimate association with their work, were part of the conditions which enabled the gradual loosening of his style and the expansion of his narrative range.

CHAPTER 5

Speaking for Ourselves

In Sargeson's 1945 short story anthology *Speaking for Ourselves*, many of the strands I have discussed in Part Two come together: a changing post-war cultural landscape in which the hegemony of masculine cultural nationalism is beginning to be disrupted, Sargeson's desire for new artistic directions, his problematic position as mentor to a new generation of writers, and the mutual imprint of the Texidor-Sargeson relationship on both authors' work.

The anthology's gestation was difficult. It was originally commissioned by the Progressive Publishing Society as a showcase for New Zealand writing of the 1940s. A call for contributions went out, and Sargeson was asked to make a final selection. But the Society collapsed in 1945, leaving the publication in limbo until the Caxton Press agreed to take it on. Reed and Harris published it in Australia.

Sargeson's slender foreword seems to have been written to pre-empt the inevitable allegations of favouritism and canon-building. His only aim, he says, has been to select stories of "the greatest possible variety" (*Speaking* 7). Here, Sargeson is being more than a little disingenuous about his editorial methods and motivations. In fact, he hand-picked most of the contributors. Seven of the fifteen stories were by authors he was actively mentoring and had asked for submissions: Finlayson, Gaskell, Gilbert, Ballantyne, Cole, Texidor and Duggan. He asked two others for contributions because he either owed them a favour (his friend E.P. Dawson, who had bankrolled the anthology) or wanted one (the Australian poet and publisher Max Harris; by including his story, Sargeson hoped to enhance the prospects of the anthology being published across the Tasman). The fifteenth story was Sargeson's own "The Hole that Jack Dug". Nearly all the unsolicited submissions were rejected.¹⁷⁴ Of the five that made the cut, four were by women: Audrey King, Lyndahl Chapple Gee, E.M. Lyders and Helen Shaw (who also wrote as Hella Hofmann; Sargeson would later mentor her, too). The other was by an unknown writer, D.M. Anderson; Sargeson told Dawson this story about

¹⁷⁴ He conveyed something of their flavour to E.P. Dawson – there were rollicking romances like "The Pearl of the Pacific", evidently a "true love story by Maritime Shaw ... so bad that it almost becomes good", and feeble domestic sketches ("Jane's Birthday"). There was enough material in his reject pile for him to publish "an auxiliary collection", he told Gaskell, which would be "packed with every sort of fantasy from masturbation to identification with God" (quoted in M. King 261-62).

a student on the run from his respectable upbringing simply “took my fancy” (Shieff, *Letters* 85).

Despite the modesty with which Sargeson described his selection policy, *Speaking for Ourselves* nonetheless reveals multiple editorial ambitions, both public and personal. Like Curnow’s seminal poetry anthologies, it announces a new myth of origin for prose fiction in New Zealand, although Sargeson’s *Year Zero* is somewhat later than Curnow’s. Reflecting Glover’s forecast that “all would be new” in the 1940s, none of the anthology’s contributors (apart from Roderick Finlayson and Sargeson himself) had published before the start of the decade. There is no Dan Davin, John A. Lee, John Mulgan, Frank Anthony, Nelle Scanlan or Isobel Andrews, all of whom had published fiction in the 1930s.¹⁷⁵ It is as if locally-produced short fiction had not existed in New Zealand before 1940, or not in a form that readers in 1945 would recognise and respond to. Here, is the post-war literary future, Sargeson’s selections announce. It is young, it looks confidently to the world beyond New Zealand and, in some cases (as I shall discuss), is modestly experimental.

It is also surprisingly feminine. More than a third of the authors are women,¹⁷⁶ although this may reflect Sargeson’s wish to allay suspicions of a supposed coterie of young male followers more than any desire for gender balance (Shieff, *Letters* 85). Interestingly, Sargeson thought that if the anthology were to be criticised for “sameness”, it would be due to the abundance of female contributors. He pointed out to E.P. Dawson “the marked similarity between all the women [in the anthology] with the exception of yourself and Greville”. Dawson’s story *could* be written by a man “if it wasn’t so obvious that it’s a woman”, he says rather opaquely, and while Texidor’s is certainly “feminine”, it is also highly individual.¹⁷⁷ But the other stories by women “are unmistakeably feminine, and all in the same way – and this seems to be one of the weaknesses of the collection – the inclusion of all these four stories results in a certain monotony which rather contradicts foreword”

¹⁷⁵ Davin’s omission is perhaps the most puzzling. By 1945, he had published several short stories (some with New Zealand settings), including in Lehmann’s *Penguin New Writing*. Possibly his expatriation, like Mansfield’s, disqualified him in Sargeson’s eyes.

¹⁷⁶ A considerably higher proportion than in the next substantial anthology of New Zealand fiction, Dan Davin’s *New Zealand Short Stories* (1953), in which only seven of the thirty contributors are women.

¹⁷⁷ I have already noted (in 4.2) Sargeson’s disdain for “feminine” fiction, as embodied by Mansfield. Not only did it privilege the trivial and the domestic, he opined, but it also over-asserted the symbolic significance of “isolated details and moments of life” with an obviousness that ran counter to his own suggestive method (“Katherine Mansfield” 29-32). He seems to have considered Texidor’s story “feminine” largely by virtue of this latter defect, which I discuss further below.

(Shieff, *Letters* 84–85). Whatever his motives for including these stories, and whatever his misgivings about their cumulative effect, Sargeson's selections nonetheless suggest a more inclusive and diverse post-war literary culture. They also suggest the more sympathetic (or at least attentive) treatment of women that will start to figure in his own fiction: it would not be long before he began work on the novella *I For One ...*, adopting a female narrative voice. The days of smutty misogynist banter with Glover and Fairburn are starting to seem a long way away.

Sargeson's foreword also emphasises his anthology's public and educative function. He is explicitly addressing a community of readers he expects to share his distaste for New Zealand's cultural philistinism ("a country which so far can't exactly be described as over-generous in its encouragement of its own writers") and mediocrity (for the time being, the best we can hope for in our short story writers is that they achieve "a very decent competence"). Thus, Sargeson draws his readers into the bigger project of which this anthology is part and to which – despite the frustrations I have already outlined – he remains committed: bringing into being a high-quality indigenous literary culture, and an educated, discerning local audience for it. By including in the anthology an ambitious new story of his own, Sargeson is also making an important personal literary statement. "The Hole that Jack Dug" is, among many things, proof of his determination to reinvent his fiction for the post-war era.

In light of all these explicit and implicit aims, it is scarcely surprising if Sargeson's selections were construed in some quarters as nepotism or an exercise in canon-building. Nor is it surprising if Sargeson's protégés were henceforth viewed as a cohesive bloc he had drilled and inculcated with a common doctrine. By bringing them together in an anthology that purportedly "speaks for" New Zealand fiction, he makes them – along with his targeted readers – collaborators in his own cultural project.

The cover image (a sketch by Sargeson's friend Eric Lee-Johnson) is suggestive of the vision that underpins that project. An isolated and apparently deserted farm cottage, complete with outdoor 'dunny', stands beside the gnarled trunk of a macrocarpa tree – the arboreal antithesis of Sargeson's rewarewa, enduring symbol of a parallel New Zealand not "as it is, but ... as it might worthily have been" (*Once* 47–48). Here, the empty paddocks beyond the macrocarpa are bathed in stark and somewhat sinister shadows that suggest night rather than

day. There is no sign of human occupation. If this is New Zealand “as it is”, it is a decidedly Sargesonian place – dark, suggestive, unsettling and unsettled.

Yet, the anthology in fact offers a more generous, various and sophisticated account of “ourselves” than is indicated by the cover. If we approach the anthology as an expression of some kind of national sensibility, as many contemporary reviewers did, it is a sensibility considerably more diverse, female, urban (or at least suburban), emotionally and sexually alive, aesthetically sophisticated, and connected to the world beyond New Zealand than we might expect. Indeed, it could be said that the anthology effectively embodies all that Sargeson found in Texidor.

At the same time, the classic Sargeson tradition still haunts the anthology as a powerful vestigial presence (even if the story with which Sargeson chose to represent himself strongly suggests a writer in the process of leaving his own tradition behind). A quick scan to find obviously Sargesonian stories turns up two prime candidates: A.P. Gaskell’s “Purity Squad” and David Ballantyne’s “An Awful Look On Her Face”. In the first, three Home Guard volunteers taking a smoko break are distracted by a small fishing boat out in the bay. Its occupants are young Edgar, one of their number who should be with them on duty, and Betty, a married woman and notorious local flirt. “I know that when Betty comes up swinging her hips and rolling her eyes at me, by Jesus, there’ve been times when I’ve wished I was still single myself,” says Alec, prompting his mate Ted to comment: “She ought to be put away ... Till Bert comes back at any rate. She’s like a cat” (*Speaking* 32–33).¹⁷⁸ The remainder of the story is given over to the men’s meandering discussion of Edgar and Betty’s relationship, and their vague realisation that Edgar may be in deeper than is good for him. The men’s sympathies diverge: Ted’s lie with the absent Bert, who is fighting in Italy, while George blames it all on Betty (“I’d give her a damn good spanking”) and the boarding school education which has made her “too forward” (35). But when he suggests they do something to stop Edgar getting hurt, or hurting someone else, there is little enthusiasm: so sensitive an intervention is “a job for the women”, they decide. They return to their work, George pausing only to wonder for a second time where his missing razor has gone, rather clumsily telegraphing the possibility of violence or self-harm (35).

¹⁷⁸ All subsequent page references in this chapter are to this *Speaking for Ourselves*, unless stated otherwise.

“Purity Squad” feels Sargesonian on several counts. Apart from the familiar cast of working men with their single-syllable names and easy-going New Zealand idiom, Gaskell’s suggestive drip-feeding of information echoes Sargeson’s method. The story unfolds as a fireside yarn, with all the expected digressions (there are side-stories about horse-racing, farming and Betty’s previous extra-marital relationships) and distractions (George’s speech is constantly punctuated by a snorted “kmf kmf,” a gap-filler of indeterminate meaning). The characters’ failures of perception and expression – if they recognise that Edgar is in fact deeply and desperately in love with Betty, the only name they have for it is “making a fool of himself” (35) – require the reader to search out the real import of their banal words. Thus, like most of Sargeson’s classic stories, Gaskell’s works not through explicit revelation or epiphany but through a compact between an offstage narrator and an assumed reader who is more sophisticated and emotionally alert than the characters. And like Sargeson’s “I’ve Lost My Pal” or “A Pair of Socks” or “A Man of Good Will”, “Purity Squad” exposes something rotten in the relations between these likeable, easy-going New Zealanders. Beneath the banter and matiness, they are shackled by the self-imposed limits of their masculinity, their repression of love and desire, their fear of women and female sexuality, their lack of a sufficiently complex idiom with which to express their feelings for a vulnerable mate.

In Ballantyne’s story, the sense of menace and sublimated violence is even stronger, though it springs from much sparser material. A small girl pesters her mother for a knife she can take out to the itinerant knife-sharpener who has set up his tools in the street nearby. Her mother hands over a pair of scissors which the child tries to give to the knife-sharpener. Preoccupied with another task, he pushes her away roughly, jokingly threatening to cut her head off. The drab suburban setting is only sketchily realised, no-one is named, the language is defiantly austere and there is next to no ‘story’ – merely a hint of one in rumours of the knife-grinder’s earlier violence to his wife (“they say he slashed all her clothes to ribbons ... [She] said her old man had tried to murder her. She had an awful look on her face, they reckoned” 62-63). Having redacted nearly everything conventionally required of literary fiction, Ballantyne leaves us with little more than an atmosphere. But it is a powerful and unsettling one, redolent of brutality and ugliness: the mother’s refusal to comfort the frightened girl at the end (“She’ll get over it if you don’t pet her”, advises her friend, 64) seems as casually cruel as the child’s treatment by the knife-grinder. And like so many of Sargeson’s early stories, its power derives precisely from the niggardly story-telling, the paring-back of all colour and extraneous detail so that the medium and the message are completely at one.

If Gaskell's and Ballantyne's contributions strike us as obviously Sargesonian, this is by no means true of all the stories by Sargeson's protégés. G.S. Gilbert's "Mrs Pornog's Afternoon" is among the most singular inclusions, set adrift not only from the familiar New Zealand scene but from any recognisable reality. A beautiful woman, Mrs Pornog, idles away her afternoons in luxury, gazing out at her exquisitely-tended garden and "the glass-blue hills" (53) beyond. Her only relief from affluent boredom comes when she is visited by young men from her husband's factory; she indulges them in a few hours of sexual adventure, but the encounters always end in their deaths. It is an erotically-charged fable about beauty and corruption, sex and death, power and exploitation. Gilbert's critique of class and power relations could be termed Sargesonian, but it is deeply coded and uses distinctly non-Sargesonian methods – surrealist passages of psychological intensity, and a feverish, heightened idiom ("Raising weakly-taut hands to her head, clenching that honey-coloured hair between fragile fingers, she cried to the empty room: 'Why must my lovers always die?'" 59). The story also owes much to Dorothy Parker's "The Custard Heart", whose Mrs Lanier bears a close likeness to Gilbert's creation. These two cruel beauties, both dressed in yellow and wearing pearls, share an aversion to poverty and ugliness, and a delight in capriciously destroying those who serve them.¹⁷⁹ Despite its 'literary' intentions and influences, Sargeson liked Gilbert's contribution mostly for its "lavish pulp story atmosphere" – perhaps also because (he told Dawson) it was one of the few stories in the anthology that Harry Doyle enjoyed (Shieff, *Letters* 85).

Duggan's "Notes on an Abstract Arachnid" is another determinedly non-realist story by a Sargeson protégé. Along with Max Harris's "The Papeye and The Molacca", it introduces a strain of self-consciously modernist writing to the anthology, enlarging its range beyond homegrown critical realism and declaring an affinity with non-realist and international literary practices. As Sargeson disliked both stories – he would have preferred another (possibly any other) story by Duggan, and considered Harris "a shockingly bad writer most times" (Richards 84; Shieff 89) – their inclusion makes an important editorial announcement. Just as this anthology makes space for women writers and youthful talents, it can also accommodate modernism – and, by implication, so too will New Zealand's post-war literary

¹⁷⁹ Texidor's daughter Cristina must be credited with spotting the connection between Gilbert's story and Parker's. In an undated letter to John Reece Cole (probably from 1946), she describes reading "The Custard Heart", commenting "it is very obvious from where 'Mrs Pornog's Afternoon' originated" (C. Driescher to Cole, undated [1946?]. Cole Papers, MS-Papers-4648-17. ATL).

culture. Thus the stories by Harris and Duggan represent what Lydia Wevers calls a “provoking and political choice [that] reglosses ‘ourselves’ away from nationalism and towards a cultural field – modernism”, thereby adding to the anthology “important dimensions of who ‘we’ might be” (“Speaking” 102–103).

However, critical reactions suggest ‘we’ were not necessarily convinced by Duggan’s strained modernist experiment, only his second published story. “Arachnid” was a “form of pretentiousness which is likely to appeal only to the few”, as H. Winston Rhodes put it, sentiments endorsed by Denis Glover and, years later, by Duggan himself who called it “embarrassing crap” (Richards 84). Like “Mrs Pornog”, the story owes something to the conventions of pulp fiction, with its lurid depiction of a woman murdered by a brutish man who then contemplates her corpse in the company of the eponymous spider. But the situation itself is simply a vehicle for Duggan’s energetic linguistic experimentation. The dense, feverish prose is saturated with would-be Joycean wordplay and neologisms – “Jumbly-wurben I kerkreekras on your crinite shadow. Gigantic I rear-sneer above your night-jingling bed ... And I shrink until I am a pulp-slug on the carpet ...” (111) – that anticipate the more successful linguistic inventiveness of Duggan’s “Along Rideout Road That Summer” and later stories. “Arachnid” frequently falters and is sometimes laughably overwrought,¹⁸⁰ but as a declaration of intent – by an emerging author, and also by an editor wanting to inaugurate a new and outward-looking literary era – the story is a striking inclusion.

Two of the five unsolicited stories Sargeson selected – Audrey King’s “It Mustn’t Happen Again” and Lyndahl Chapple Gee’s “Double Unit” – are war stories or, more precisely, post-war stories. Perhaps they were at the root of Sargeson’s fears of “sameness”, for they are strikingly alike in theme and narrative method. Both are also strongly Sargesonian, with their flat, spare prose, their dissection of dull lives circumscribed by convention and devoid of compassion or vitality. In both, wives awkwardly attempt to reconnect with husbands who have returned home from war. In King’s story, a woman prepares herself to greet her husband after a four-year absence, aware of her own transformation but knowing nothing of how the war may have changed him. She soon discovers that taciturn and unemotional Mark is stuck just where he was, unable to articulate anything of his wartime experiences and unwilling to remember whatever “terrible things” he may have seen. His wife’s hopes that the war might

¹⁸⁰ “I am the reason growing like hair on the hands of your memory” (*Speaking for Ourselves* 111), Ian Richards says, “must rank among the worst sentences published in New Zealand literature” (84).

have reconfigured their relationship appear to be dashed: all will be just as it was. The story closes with her contemplating the barren existence ahead: “Here it all was. The same room, the table covered with dirty dishes, the little pot of flowers, the chairs pushed back, and a crumpled serviette on the floor. The same. And Mark. He was a man sitting there” (15). In the more inventive “Double Unit”, Lyndahl Chapple Gee plays with the ‘doubling’ alluded to in the title, putting the device to work in multiple ways.¹⁸¹ Two war wives, Mrs Gladson and Mrs Dunbar, share the eponymous double unit and more – both have husbands serving overseas, both have young sons who know their fathers “only as photographs upon the mantelpiece” (25), both have acquired new responsibilities and freedoms in their husbands’ absence. But they are more different than alike: as Gee tells us helpfully in the opening paragraph, “[f]rom their makeup to their morals they were opposites” (23). Tidy, industrious, utterly faithful Louise Dunbar has missed her absent husband constantly while flighty Millie Gladson has missed “the company of men in general” (24), happily substituting a succession of boyfriends for her (also philandering) husband. So carefully are these binaries established that it somehow comes as no surprise that, when the husbands return from war, they too are mirror images – not only of each other, but of their former selves. While Louise’s Joel has grown coarse and abusive, Millie’s once feckless Rodney is now disillusioned, deep-thinking and politicised, wanting only to make the world a better place for his son. In the background are the harpies of puritan New Zealand so familiar from Sargeson’s fiction: curtain-twitching busybodies “seething with patriotism and repression” (27), quick to condemn their neighbours’ moral lapses.

Those who would later accuse Sargeson of spawning second-rate imitations might point to these two stories as evidence. Although it appears both King and Gee were unknown to him, it is very likely that he was well-known to them, that they had read and studied his stories, and that they saw Sargeson and his work – if not as “the only New Zealand writer worth talking about, and his way of writing stories the only possible way” (L. Jones, “Out from Under” 84) – then certainly as a model. But while both King and Gee successfully capture the surface details of the Sargesonian New Zealand scene, they lack his craft: the narrative dexterity and obliquity, the insinuation of meaning, the provoking dialogue with the reader.

¹⁸¹ Gee does not seem to have published extensively: the only other published work I have been able to locate is the children’s poem “Mihi and the last of the Moas” (Auckland: Oswald-Sealy, 1943) which she both wrote and illustrated. If she is known to contemporary readers at all, it is probably as the mother of Maurice Gee. Writing in *New Zealand Books* (2006), Kathryn Walls has identified a connection between “Mihi” and Maurice Gee’s *O* trilogy of fantasy novels (12).

Here, messages are hammered home by an earnest authorial voice or baldly articulated by characters who are far too self-aware to be either convincing or especially interesting: “I’ve moved on. ... I’m not there where you left me. I’m way ahead,” thinks King’s protagonist (14).

The war – not as a theatre of violent combat or even self-discovery, but as an agency of psychological and social disturbance – forms the backdrop to three other stories. John Reece Cole’s “Blues in the Night” is unusual for taking the anthology’s readers out of New Zealand and, nearly, to the conflict zone itself. The central story recounted by an English non-commissioned officer, Don, is embedded within another narrative told by a New Zealand airman stationed at the same base. Don, a former Spitfire pilot stripped of his wings after multiple accidents and unspecified misdemeanours, is a constant reminder to the New Zealand and Australian airmen “of what might happen if a bloke cracked up on the job” (74). Over a game of cards, he tells his colonial companions of his brief affair in London with a beautiful female officer. Managing to conceal both his lowly origins and the fact that he was AWOL, he manoeuvred her into bed where he insisted she wear her officer’s jacket while they made love: “it did something to me deep down to feel beneath my fingers the braid on her sleeve,” he tells his fellow airmen. “All the pain went. I felt ... well, sort of complete. As if nothing they could do to me could ever matter again” (80; ellipsis in original). Inevitably, Don was arrested; he ends his story with the forlorn observation that while he was in jail, his one-time lover was promoted to Flight Officer: “Now she’ll have two rings of braid around her arm!” (82).

There is a louche sophistication to Cole’s storytelling – a quality which bothered Sargeson, who found in his work “a hint of Hollywood script” (M. King 250) – but also an unevenness of tone. In the space of a few paragraphs, Don’s voice veers from the vernacular (“she was a smasher – straight she was!” 74) to a kind of pulp-fiction journalese (“She asked for a drink from the flask. She had several. Then, when she suggested having another, I said wasn’t she making the pace too hot?” 80) to something striving hard for literary effect (“Her head had a confident tilt, her skin was only a shade lighter than her hair ... Her black tie was rising and falling with the movement of her breasts, which even the uniform couldn’t spoil the shape of” 77). Moreover, the story struggles under the weight of a very full authorial agenda. Cole wants to highlight the collision between robust colonial anti-authoritarianism and the hierarchical military system, to critique the suffocating class consciousness of the English,

and to suggest how transgressive women (those who rise beyond their allotted rank) subjugate and destroy men. In intent, “Blues in the Night” typifies much intermodernist fiction (see 8.4), with its interest in interrogating “relations between elite and common, experimental and popular, urban and rural, masculine and feminine, abstract and realistic, colonial and colonised” (Bluemel 3). But it is as if Cole has constructed the story as a vehicle for his extra-textual concerns, rather than allowing them to emerge out of his fictional situation and characters. It is a story brought to life more through a feat of engineering than a creative act.

The remaining two ‘war’ stories are Texidor’s “Anyone Home?” and Sargeson’s “The Hole that Jack Dug”. His enigmatic tale of Jack Parker’s obsessive digging, helped by the narrator Tom and under the unhappy gaze of Mrs Parker, has been much-anthologised and analysed. Its equivocations and ambiguities have provoked readings that consider not only the question of what Jack is doing and why, but also what Sargeson is doing and why. They include During’s probing modern-realist reading in the journal *And* (1983), Joost Daalder’s Romantic reading in which Jack is a “noble savage” engaged in an essentially creative act, and Peter Simpson’s reading of the story as literary parable (all three articles were substantially reprinted in SPAN, 1986, as “Three Readings”). In 1998, Wevers read it as a war story framed by “the process of social subjection” in which Jack’s meaningless, yet profoundly meaningful, work shows “the nation, ourselves, in disguise, at war with itself, at war with ourselves” (“Speaking” 107, 109). In 1999, Harry Ricketts drew attention to encoded narrative details, notably Mrs Parker’s choice of reading material, that show Sargeson reaching out to the highbrow overseas readership he secretly yearned for (“A Note” 44).

But in the context of *Speaking for Ourselves*, “The Hole that Jack Dug” might also stand as a personal declaration of intent. Here Sargeson bids farewell to the tightly compressed narratives of the past with a bravura display of his signature strategies: enigmatic layers of meaning rendered in language that refuses to rise above the flatly pedestrian, the assumption of a sophisticated literary reader (someone who knows what to think about Mrs Parker’s enthusiasm for the second-rate Hugh Walpole, for example), the impending tragedy (the death of the Parkers’ son) that floats beneath the story like an unexploded depth charge. With this story, Sargeson highlights the limitations of short-form fiction, declaring it impossible that so small a canvas can accommodate the enormity of Jack’s seemingly senseless project, or the multiple meanings all his digging unearths. Hints, insinuations, disguised poetry,

evasions have served Sargeson well for a decade, as have the strangled voices of a succession of Toms; here, he gives notice that he now considers he has exhausted those particular seams.¹⁸² Over a decade, he has dug them out just as exhaustively as Jack has excavated his backyard. In the confined scope of the short story form, all he can deliver with the techniques he has honed so finely, is an enigma.

Thus, Sargeson's contribution to the anthology indicates the directions his fiction will take in the post-war world: increasingly equivocal and oblique, less tendentious, reverberant with a greater range of idioms and narrative voices, responsive to a larger world beyond the circumscribed New Zealand scene. "The Hole that Jack Dug" thereby registers the new possibilities that Texidor, among other influences, was opening up to him in the 1940s.

Fittingly, Texidor's own contribution "Anyone Home?" reveals the extent of her debt to Sargeson. All the strategies she has learned from her mentor are in evidence: economy, suggestiveness, a delight in dark social comedy, a disdain for the "petty hell" of rural New Zealand (Sargeson, *Never* 63). Her central character, Roy, has returned from war service in the Pacific and is visiting the family farm of his fiancée, Lily. He presents initially as a stock Sargesonian character, speaking to himself and others in the usual clipped, parsimonious idiom: "He was good and brown. He looked good in that shirt. Lily would like it" (89). Texidor's treatment of the ghastly celebratory afternoon tea organised by Lily's parents is a classic excoriation of rural New Zealand puritanism – the pompous local schoolteacher who inflicts on the gathering his album of old photos from the Islands; wretched Mrs Withers, her endlessly apologetic conversation leaking out of her like "something left running ... seeping colourless from a wound" (92); her disagreeable husband with his joyless laughter and derisive silences. Throughout, we are privy to Roy's unspoken resentments and sense the inevitable collision with Lily and her family. Roy has returned from war with an aggressive conviction that it is "[o]ur innings now" (89), the start of a new era of pleasure, spontaneity and freedom. He and Lily will be moving to the city, he tells Mr and Mrs Withers; they want to go dancing and have fun. But Texidor makes it clear that Roy's future is unlikely to unfold along these lines. Prim, perennially-disappointed Lily is as repressed and fearful as her

¹⁸² Jack, however – the man of vision, vitality and poetry – is exactly the sort of character with whom Sargeson will become increasingly preoccupied. As Peter Simpson points out in "Three Readings", while Sargeson himself is often portrayed as a "Tom figure, the advocate of a Lawsonian realism and progenitor of a tribe of writers" who all sound very much the same, Sargeson is in fact more of a Jack figure, "a poet (of the earth, so to speak)" (Simpson et al. 91).

parents, almost certainly destined to drain Roy's vitality just as the genteel Mrs Parker tries to do to her husband in "The Hole that Jack Dug". It seems significant that Lily has prepared for Roy's return and their impending marriage by having her teeth pulled out – the first step in becoming less alive, of succumbing to the sterile conventions of puritan New Zealand with its "glazed faces and china-white smiles" (98).

But there is more going on here than ruthless social vivisection. For all his self-confident bravado, war has left Roy physically and psychologically damaged in ways he can scarcely acknowledge to himself, let alone share with others. Texidor does not allow his limitations and delusions to restrict the reader's view, however, deploying narrative techniques which her mentor Sargeson would never have used, at least not in the early 1940s. She collapses time: when Roy's train enters a tunnel, he returns to the "anaesthetic darkness" of his wartime stay in hospital where "down in the wicked silence" he saw death, "the dream that is no dream and lasts for ever" (90, 94). She distorts words and syntax to enact her protagonist's shattered psyche ("no Roy, no me, no life, no dying, no rest. Only the suffering speck not-I", 94) and introduces a symbolic language to render the horrors that Roy's wartime experiences have laid bare. Like Jack's hole in Sargeson's story, a defiantly unfathomable void sits at the heart of "Anyone Home?" too; here, a pool on the Withers's farm becomes Roy's personal abyss, a monstrous darkness where his fiancée's reflection floats like "an angel in dark ice. The blue space behind the skull was staring through eyes like crystals" (93).

Sargeson was dismayed by "Anyone Home?", especially by Texidor's flirtations with surrealism and stream-of-consciousness narration. He also disliked the story Duggan originally submitted for the anthology on the grounds it was too obscure: Sargeson was conscious that the book's sales had to generate enough to pay its backers. He asked both authors for a more "accessible story" and while Duggan evidently agreed (although whether "Arachnid" really fitted the bill is a moot point), Texidor remained adamant that it was "Anyone Home?" or nothing (M. King 263). Her insistence might have reflected the considerable time she had already spent reworking the story with Duggan's assistance. After Sargeson had made his opinion of it plain – Texidor complained she had "been hauled over the coals very hot coals by Frank"¹⁸³ – she turned to Duggan. His critique of her original draft was practical and specific. He identified a mismatch between Roy's "ordinary colonial" character and the "sharp and visual and apt" impressions which Texidor attributed to him,

¹⁸³ Texidor to Duggan, undated [1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

and suggested she show Roy “struggling but unable to express his reactions and condition”.¹⁸⁴ Texidor followed this advice – the nearest Roy gets to disclosure in the final version is his muttered admission that “I haven’t got the war out of my system” (94) – and Duggan described the redrafted story as “really amazing and accurate”.¹⁸⁵ Sargeson remained unconvinced, though. To others, he referred to it as a “chunk of Greville’s private soul-writing” and suggested she had over-reached herself.¹⁸⁶

For all Sargeson’s antipathy, Texidor’s story draws together many of the anthology’s disparate threads. We find in it anxiety about the destabilising effects of the recent war, a sense that a new dispensation is emerging in which social and gender relations will be subtly recalibrated (the question posed by her title suggests that “Home” might start to look somewhat different to New Zealanders in the post-war era), and – in her excursions beyond the tightly-sprung idiom and form of Sargesonian realism – a recognition that modernist practices too can be part of the repertoire of the writer wanting to articulate the local.

¹⁸⁴ Duggan to Texidor, undated [1944?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

¹⁸⁵ Duggan to Texidor, undated [1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

¹⁸⁶ Sargeson to Duggan, 19 May 1945. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-08. ATL.

PART THREE:
READING TEXIDOR

CHAPTER 6

Unfirm environments: from Spain to Paparoa

6.1 Introduction

Greville Texidor's fiction was produced over a relatively short and intense period, from approximately 1941 to the mid-1950s. All her published work was written in New Zealand – six stories that appeared in periodicals in New Zealand, Britain and Australia from 1942–1945; “Anyone Home?”, written for *Speaking for Ourselves* (1945); and the novella *These Dark Glasses*, published by Caxton in 1949 but completed at least five years earlier.¹⁸⁷ These eight works and six previously unpublished stories were selected by Kendrick Smithyman for the 1987 Victoria University Press collection *In Fifteen Minutes You Can Say A Lot*. Another story Texidor wrote in New Zealand – one of several which Smithyman evidently knew of, but decided not to include – later appeared in the journal *Brief* in 2006.¹⁸⁸

Texidor published no more fiction after leaving New Zealand for Australia in 1948, although she certainly continued to write and to experiment with different genres. Among her papers at the State Library of New South Wales are the typescripts of at least eighteen short stories, translations, poems and three novels at varying stages of completeness, including multiple drafts of a substantial novel based on her experiences in the Spanish Civil War (see chapter 7). She also wrote plays for stage and radio, two of which were broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Commission in 1953. Some of the fifty Lorca poems she translated were also

¹⁸⁷ The first story Texidor published was “Home Front” (*New Zealand New Writing* no. 1 1942). Under the title “Epilogue”, it was also published in *Penguin New Writing* (no. 17 1943). It was followed by “Santa Cristina” (*Penguin New Writing* no. 22 1944); “Time of Departure” (*Angry Penguins* 1944); “At Home and Alone” (*Angry Penguins* 1944); “An Annual Affair” (*New Zealand New Writing* no. 3 1944); and “Elegy” (*Anvil* September 1945). *These Dark Glasses* was originally accepted by the Australian publisher Reed and Harris in 1944 but the firm collapsed before the novel could be published.

¹⁸⁸ This was “San Toni”, probably written in 1944, according to Evelyn M. Hulse who prepared it for its 2006 publication.

broadcast by the ABC and a handful of others appeared in *Ern Malley's Journal* in Australia and *New Directions in Prose and Poetry* in New York.¹⁸⁹

As the only collection of Texidor's work, *In Fifteen Minutes* demands to be read as the definitive expression of her literary achievement. Its editor Kendrick Smithyman – who, as a young poet, knew Texidor briefly in Auckland and produced the cover art for the Caxton Press edition of *These Dark Glasses* – does not attempt to present the stories in order of publication or composition, which is anyway unclear. Nor does he distinguish the previously published work from the unpublished. Instead, his organising principle is both geographic and biographic. The first eight stories have European settings (including one, the title story, set in Britain), while the remaining six are set in 1940s New Zealand. Smithyman's arrangement means the stories follow the same arc as Texidor's own journeys during the 1930s and '40s, travelling from heady pre-war European bohemia, to Civil War Spain, to a hostile Britain at the outbreak of a new war, and finally to the doubtful comforts of wartime New Zealand. Smithyman's introduction emphasises these biographical correspondences. He observes how, as the fiction moves from Spain to New Zealand, it registers Texidor's desperate passion for the first and her estrangement from the second, her very different responses to what Sargeson called "the Spain she had loved so much" and "the New Zealand Northland for which she felt almost no love at all" (Sargeson, "Texidor" 136). Another justification for the geographic-biographic arrangement has been advanced by Dale Benson, whose thesis "A World Like This" (2000) argues that the first group of stories "suggest why Texidor left Europe and went to New Zealand" while the second "suggest what she thought about this country once she had arrived and why she eventually moved on" (182).

But *In Fifteen Minutes* stands as more than a de facto record of where Texidor went and what she did. Certainly, at many points the fiction correlates with Texidor's own unsettled and intensely-felt life, as Smithyman asserts. But the collection also maps the development of a set of artistic and intellectual responses unique in New Zealand literature – responses to a

¹⁸⁹ *Ern Malley's Journal* (1952-55), whose title exploited Australia's most celebrated literary hoax, was a short-lived journal that appeared after the collapse of *Angry Penguins* in 1946 (see also footnote 301). The New York publishing company New Directions was founded in 1936 by the poet James Laughlin. Throughout the 1940s and '50s, it published several journals, series and anthologies featuring then-emerging writers such as William Saroyan, Marianne Moore, Delmore Schwartz and Dylan Thomas. New Directions also published work by established authors including Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams ("A Brief History", New Directions Publishing).

lifetime of displacements, strandings and reinventions compelled by personality, circumstance and what Baxter would call the “winds of a terrible century”.¹⁹⁰

Texidor’s fiction registers both a determined placelessness and an acute responsiveness to the particularities of her new homeland. Sometimes she scans the New Zealand scene as if still on the outside, damning it with the scornful disdain of a sophisticated European aesthete. Elsewhere, she writes as if from within, but invests the social and physical landscape with a defamiliarising strangeness and savagery. Texidor’s writing is as restless and “homeloose” as she was in person; it too refuses to settle, or to participate in the “deep, horizontal comradeship” that Benedict Anderson imagines linking writers and readers from the same communities (7). Whether her stories are set in New Zealand or Europe, Texidor is drawn to what Wevers calls “unfirm environment[s]” (“Always Outside” 76) in which, as so much of the period’s nationalist literature also asserts, human occupation is contingent and tenuous.

Texidor’s prose style is equally mobile. Sometimes she deploys all the armoury of European modernism – symbolism, surrealism, disrupted time sequences, dream writing, the intense concentration on a single image or moment. Elsewhere, she adopts (and adapts to her own purposes) a more austere, naturalistic and inescapably Sargesonian style. As a body of work, Texidor’s fiction thus shows the variety and range we might expect from her peripatetic personal history. But the variety also underlines the extent to which Texidor’s time in New Zealand was effectively her literary apprenticeship. Here, with Sargeson as mentor and Duggan as sympathetic fellow-pupil, Texidor was furnished with a literary education and the chance to experiment with different voices and attitudes to her material, to copy and adapt a wide range of narrative models, to try and fail and try again.

6.2 The developing stylist

Writing to Texidor, probably in 1945, Maurice Duggan identified “the two technical aspects” that he thought defined the stories she had published in 1944, the most productive year of her

¹⁹⁰ “Those we knew when we were young, / None of them have stayed together, / All their marriages battered down like trees / By the winds of a terrible century”. “He Waiata mo Te Kare”, *Collected Poems* 537–40.

writing career so far. One aspect was represented by “Santa Cristina”, “At Home and Alone” and “Time of Departure”, he said;¹⁹¹ the other by “An Annual Affair”. Her latest story “Anyone Home?” (which Duggan had read several times in draft) brought the two aspects together and was, he considered, “as good as anything you have done”:

It is hard to know just what are the points that make [“Anyone Home?”] so bloody good ... Mainly I think it is this: You seem so far ahead doing these finished things that I would like to do, doing them like this, and I, reading them, am aware that this is probably what my experiment is leading to and despairing ... This is what I hope my experimenting is leading to – conscious, accomplished, the conscious artist or some such awful phrase.¹⁹²

In this section, I want to examine the stories Duggan cites and others written around the same time, identifying the technical characteristics he refers to and what they reveal of Texidor’s progress towards becoming an ‘accomplished’ and ‘conscious’ artist. Although Duggan classifies Texidor’s stories primarily by their stylistic attributes, he also distinguishes them by setting, as Smithyman does: “Santa Cristina”, “At Home and Alone” and “Time of Departure” (all set in wartime Spain) comprise a distinct group, and those set in New Zealand another. For the sake of convenience, I too deal separately with the European and New Zealand stories – even though Texidor was writing them at the same time, and notwithstanding the many qualities and concerns common to both groups.

The European stories

Most of the stories in *In Fifteen Minutes*, and the bulk of the surviving unpublished stories written in New Zealand, draw on Texidor’s intensely-remembered European past, particularly her experiences of Spain. Given what we know of Sargeson’s fascination with Texidor’s Civil War experiences, it is highly likely that they furnished the raw material for her very first forays into fiction, even though her first *published* story, “Home Front”, is set in rural Northland.

¹⁹¹ In another letter, he suggested “Reconstruction”, also included in the Victoria University Press anthology, fell into this category too. See Duggan to Texidor, Thursday [1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

¹⁹² First ellipsis in original. Duggan to Texidor, 16 May [1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL. Duggan’s biographer Ian Richards comments that “bloody good” (and variants thereof) was at this time the young writer’s highest form of critical praise (79).

Throughout the European stories, we see Texidor reaching deep into intensely remembered moments and experiences, using concentrated and highly lyrical language to fix them on the page. Her method recalls the sustained, intense, Proustian prose style Duggan was developing at the same time as he sought to move beyond the naturalism of his earliest work. James Joyce once described Proust's method as "analytic still life" (quoted in Levin, *The Gates of Horn* 444) and Duggan, in his essay "Talking of Writing" (1960), likewise emphasised the concentrated stasis of Proust's prose, calling it "an inflorescence, a folding, an intensification" (quoted in Richards 263). Duggan continued to refine his own form of "inflorescence" throughout the late 1940s and '50s. When the narrator of Duggan's 1945 story "Machinery Me" looks at the harbour, he observes with Hemingway-esque economy and rhythm that "The wind was off the water, with a keen chill, but in the shelter the world was fine and warm and very bright" (*Collected Stories* 32). By 1960, when May Laverty throws back her curtains to reveal the harbour view, she registers what she sees with a slow-burning, sustained lyricism: "seemingly suspended in dark air ... a liner lighted in tiers and floodlit at funnel and mast, moving slowly across the dark glass, floating as fragile as tinsel above the broadcast yellow jewels of the city lights" ("Blues for Miss Laverty", *Collected Stories* 175). Given this was the direction Duggan's prose would take, his admiration for the lush poetry of Texidor's European stories is unsurprising.

The most accomplished and consistent of Texidor's European stories are "Santa Cristina", "Jesús Jiménez" and "Maaree". "Santa Cristina" appeared in *Penguin New Writing* (no. 22, 1944) a year after "Home Front". According to Sargeson, if the latter showed she had "assimilated [this country] remarkably well considering" (Shieff, *Letters* 90), "Santa Cristina" confirmed she "could be relaxed and at her ease only when the New Zealand scene was absent from her work" ("Greville Texidor" 137). Set in a village outside Barcelona at the outbreak of the Civil War, the story's protagonist is the gypsy-like Cristina. Little more than "rags and bones walking, and a desolate monkey grin", the old woman survives by begging and telling fortunes, tolerated and taunted in turn by the locals (Texidor, *Fifteen Minutes* 96).¹⁹³ Near the hut where she shelters at night is a neglected church housing the relics of the village's patron saint, Santa Cristina, whose feast-day is about to be celebrated. From her vantage point, Cristina observes the comings-and-goings in the village, including the periodic

¹⁹³ Throughout, unless stated otherwise, all quotations from Texidor's published work are from *In Fifteen Minutes You Can Say a Lot: Selected Fiction*, ed. Kendrick Smithyman (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1987).

arrivals of a slick young man to visit his mistress, a foreign blonde. He is a revolutionary from Barcelona, known to Cristina only as a far-off place of “clanging trams and factories and manifestos” (95); he is also a harbinger of the bloodshed that will inevitably spread from the city. The story ends with a violent struggle, the flight of the local priest, a death and the certainty of more killing to come. At the last, the figures of Cristina and her long-dead namesake are brought together when she is attacked in her hut. Falling to the ground, her rags

gave way without a sound, like cobwebs, and she lay quiet, a heap of pale bones on the ground until a finger of moonlight entered the hut. Then she gathered her bones together and covered herself with a sack. (100)

This conflation of the outcast and the saint, the living and the long-dead, is one of several supernatural and surreal moments that punctuate the story. Dreams and premonitions are commonplace, and the landscape is filled with omens – the owls who call from “nests of darkness” (92), the red sky, the afternoon wind “that lived behind the hills and panted down the valley and fluttered the shutters with hot, heavy breaths” (95). The inanimate world brims portentously with life:

on nights when the moon and the tide of nightingales rose the watchers were silenced, for now the valley was boiling with light and life. Then if a cloud crossed the white life of the valley Cristina would step outside to curse it away, and sit in the doorway keeping an eye on things, till a grey breeze lifted the night and a bird called with a soft human voice. (93)

This is no sentimental elegy for a lost landscape or an ancient and vanished way of life, though: an insistent note of menace and impending disaster tolls throughout. Horror and cruelty are always at the margins of Cristina’s world – the hotel-keeper’s small son shouts abuse as he skips past to trap birds in the wood, a “sick smell” (95) rises from a pit where bound rabbits wait to be killed for the celebratory feast, while in the church the skull of the saint grins beneath its wreath of orange blossoms.

To the young Duggan, then fully committed to literary experimentation of the kind that would soon produce “Notes on an Abstract Arachnid”, Texidor’s story was sheer “poetry”. Lyrical and suggestive, it was “utterly different from anything else I have seen”, he told her in November 1944:

I felt the imagery to be so accurate that I wondered why I had never realized it before ... That part – “the Blue Line bus drove right through the church shattering it like an eggshell, and then right over the cliff with all the holiday-makers still in their seats” [a dream told to the central character] – appealed to me, although perhaps I read the symbolism into

it. ... What matters is that I like it, I am impressed with it ... I am envious, and I know it's a bloody fine thing.¹⁹⁴

Writing to E.P. Dawson about "Santa Cristina" in February 1944, Sargeson likewise described it as "extraordinary". But he expressed reservations about the apparently unregulated lushness of the writing, a quality he associated both with surrealism and an absence of narrative control:

She's like Father Christmas in the way she pours out a succession of brightly coloured striking images. She may be a genius. I don't know. But whether her vague easy-going topsy-turviness is a species of surrealism or just plain carelessness I've never been able to decide.¹⁹⁵

His misgivings about Texidor's "easy-going topsy-turviness" are not without foundation. Even in a polished story like "Santa Cristina", she sometimes reaches for metaphors that seem sloppy or muddled. When she describes "the ants, dull black of burnt paper like a funeral procession" (93), is she likening the ants or the burnt paper to the procession? Other images strain too hard to convey meaning, or are diminished by their over-abundance: "The sky was soft as bloom on grapes, hundreds of soft blue shawls and always another behind" (100). But there is also evidence of restraint and selectivity, a determination (perhaps instilled by Sargeson) to use her imagery in the service of plot and character rather than as shimmering surface decoration. Texidor's attention to the heat and uncanny stillness of the location – Cristina's hut that smells "of stale sunlight and earth" (92), the sandy courtyard with "the trees and the rocks standing so still in their shadows" (95), the semi-deserted church in which light "pour[s] like wine over the rough stones" (97) – serves to foreshadow and intensify the shocking explosion of violence at the story's climax. A few well-chosen visual images emphasise the discordance between this ancient landscape and those who have intruded, the priest and the revolutionary. Watching Father Josep walk along the white dusty road, Cristina observes "the priest's black was outside nature. The black drank his sweat" (93). Equally intrusive is the dashing young revolutionary's arrival on his motorbike; he props it casually against the roadside shrine while handing out "*Film Fun* and peanut candy, American cigarettes and a manifesto" to his admiring girlfriend (96). Duggan, a lapsed Catholic, told Texidor that he found this juxtaposition of the motorbike and the shrine "shocking ... but terribly forceful".¹⁹⁶ Texidor's control over her material, despite Sargeson's

¹⁹⁴ Duggan to Texidor, 5 November 1944. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

¹⁹⁵ Sargeson to Dawson, 16 February 1944. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/002. HC.

¹⁹⁶ Duggan to Texidor, 5 November 1944. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

doubts, is evident also in the strategies she uses to impart essential pieces of narrative information to the reader – the repeated phrase “The days between fiestas are all alike”, for example, becomes a mournful bell-like refrain that chimes the passing of time.

The sure-footedness Texidor demonstrated in “Santa Cristina” earned it the admiration of John Lehmann and eventually Sargeson, who presumably sent the story to Lehmann for publication. Sargeson eventually overcame his earlier misgivings, calling the story her “finest achievement” (*Never* 64). The same level of accomplishment is also evident in “Jesús Jiménez”, which draws on Texidor’s experience of running the home for refugee children during the Spanish Civil War. Its date of composition is unknown, although the archival drafts suggest it may have been written in Paparoa: whether Sargeson had a hand in its completion is uncertain. At any event, it remained unpublished until *In Fifteen Minutes*. Like “Santa Cristina” and other “European” stories, “Jesús Jiménez” is a war story concerned more with the marginal existence of the damaged and overlooked than with the heroics of combatants. Told in the first person, the eponymous narrator is a six-year-old refugee from the Civil War, sent from Madrid to the comparative safety of a children’s home in the Pyrenées that a British señora runs for a relief agency. The story is distinguished by its carefully sustained, although highly artificial, narrative voice. Jesús Jiménez’s observations of his new environment are by turns naïve, eloquent, capricious, cruel and funny, their vigour and freshness allowing Texidor to paint a compelling picture of Spain at war without recourse to proselytising. The suffering of its people, the internecine squabbling among the *extranjeros* who purport to be helping the Republican cause, the barren political slogans – all the complexity and bitter irony of the Civil War is implicit in the child’s artless reportage:

A man from England comes. He wears a white helmet like a jungle explorer. He is going to make a vegetable garden. The flowers are all uprooted: the boys stand around him waiting for his commands. War is very wicked and cruel, he says. Then he gets diarrhoea and goes to bed.
(85)

Although the language is less lush than “Santa Cristina” and the sentences blunter – there are few “brightly coloured striking images” here – the prose’s very plainness carries more force. As in “An Annual Affair”, discussed elsewhere, Texidor skilfully pitches her figurative language in a child’s limited register. When Jesús Jiménez describes stealing turnips at dusk, we are told only that “the sky is turnip colour. A bell is ringing and over the cold fields people are calling. The turnips, washed in a muddy pool, taste bitter” (89). In the dormitories at night:

There is waking up. Screams sound through the house. They dream their mothers are dead or we are surrounded... [The señora] tries to lift Helmuth from his cot; he lies like a stone, he doesn't want to wake. Once awake, he fights and scratches her, screaming words that nobody understands. Then he falls on her shoulder; his tears fall. (87)

In “Santa Cristina” and “Jesús Jiménez”, Texidor’s efforts to discipline her instinctive and potentially overripe lyricism succeed, but this is not always the case. In the unpublished story “View from Mount Calvary”, for example,¹⁹⁷ we see her rather uncertainly feeling her way towards a language she considers appropriate to her material but which ultimately obscures it. Like “Santa Cristina”, this story too is set in an isolated Catalan village as the Civil War gains momentum; here, too, an outcast becomes a victim of political violence, and the destruction of an ancient way of life is imminent. The starkly beautiful landscape is brought to life through lush sensory detail, and there are passages in which the writing is strong and fresh. Yet, for the most part, the prose feels woolly and lacking in precision, the characterisation weak and the tone uncertain. Here, the “pictorial detail”, which Sargeson considered such a strength of her work (“Greville Texidor” 136), lacks sharpness. The chapel on this hillside is “a dead thing in the sun, its substance merged and meaningless as a sea stone” (how does a sea stone look, let alone a “merged” one?), a hermit’s gesture of welcome gives off “a savour like [a] hot dinner” (how can a gesture produce an odour?). And whereas in “Santa Cristina”, the contrast between the protagonist’s innocent wisdom (indeed, her saintliness) and the ignorant violence of the outside world is hinted at, the same contrast is telegraphed here with a heavy hand. Mount Calvary’s hermit is essentially a mouthpiece for an ideology, articulating the ancient mystic faith that the revolutionaries want to sweep away – although, as in “Santa Cristina”, Texidor insists that the rhetorics of religion and of politics are equally impoverished. Hearing the revolutionary songs of the anarchists who have taken over the village, the hermit tells a villager with improbably Lorca-esque eloquence, “Words are torn by the wind or lost in the fire but ... [t]he sign of the Señor is printed on the heart and your song is only blood that runs crying in the night”. Here, realism and symbolism make uncomfortable bedfellows, and the deftness with which they are accommodated elsewhere (in “Santa Cristina”, for example, or “Anyone Home?”) seems to have eluded Texidor.

¹⁹⁷ MS. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 2, Folder 6. UA. All quotations from “View from Mount Calvary” are from this source.

Duggan was disappointed by “View from Mount Calvary” when he read the draft in 1944 or early 1945. The story started promisingly, he told Texidor in another undated letter:

“especially at the beginning the thing is almost pure poetry”.¹⁹⁸ But poetry was not enough in itself: it needed to serve a purpose, whether by amplifying character and setting or providing some kind of narrative propulsion. A satisfying story, Duggan suggested – however opaque, plotless, non-linear and impressionistic, all qualities he valued highly – must offer more than a series of powerfully atmospheric scenes and exquisite fragments. He also found the characterisation unconvincing and remained unsatisfied by the “completeness of the thing”. Texidor kept struggling with “View from Mount Calvary” for some time, making cuts suggested by both Duggan and Sargeson. She hoped to send it to the New York poet-editor-art critic Nicolas Calamaris¹⁹⁹ along with Duggan’s story “Mezzanine” in October 1945, but was ultimately unable to resolve the problems Duggan had identified. Eventually, the story was abandoned.²⁰⁰

Another incomplete and unpublished piece, “Trees and Days”, shows Texidor pushing her prose even further into the realms of “pure poetry”. Here, language goes into freefall as she reaches back into childhood, elaborating upon a series of intensely remembered (or dreamt?) moments and images:

The lime tree. In the middle of all the garden the lime tree is in the sky. ...
And all round it you cannot get to the middle where it begins. ... But
behind the lime you can get to it through the jungle branch and wet you
can get th[r]ough branches and wet you can get there and see the black
trunk of the tree. And you can believe that the wet black trunk is the lime
tree. So you can go so you can go once.²⁰¹

Texidor seems intent on exploring the capacity of language to directly render fragments of experience and sensation, and the febrile world of dreams. Quite where this exercise in surrealism would have taken her is unclear: only fragments of “Trees and Days” remain. But her interest in representing the unconscious and in dream worlds emerges repeatedly in other work she was writing at this time, whether set in New Zealand or Europe. Dreams – of snails,

¹⁹⁸ Duggan to Texidor, 10 June [1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL. Unless stated otherwise, all quotes in this paragraph are from this source,

¹⁹⁹ Calamaris, who had sought exile in America in 1940, was a champion of European surrealism and the avant-garde. Texidor knew him through her former brother-in-law, the journalist and war correspondent Sherry Mangan.

²⁰⁰ Texidor to Duggan, 4 October [1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

²⁰¹ MS. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 2, Folder 6. UA. All quotations from “Trees and Days” are from this source.

rice and bus-crashes in “Santa Cristina”, for example; of train journeys, escalators and nightclubs in “Time of Departure” – are regularly recounted and decoded. In other stories, hypnosis (“Time of Departure”), overdoses (“Maaree”) or anaesthesia (“Anyone Home?” and “Time of Departure”) produce febrile waking dream-states which, perversely, allow Texidor’s characters to see more clearly the material world in all its horrifying meaninglessness.

Both the experience of altered consciousness, and the search for a language to represent it, were clearly of intense mutual interest to Texidor and Duggan. John Reece Cole recalled typical Saturday night gatherings at the Droeschers’ home in East Coast Road:

Maurice and Greville usually stuck it out to the last. They often moved into a small room adjoining the lounge and the kitchen. Here for hours they would communicate in what was to me a convoluted verbal free association. Werner, making what he sometimes called one of his ‘English Chokes’, referred to it as Jabberwocky. (Cole, “Jabberwocky” 3)

Cole’s account of these Jabberwocky sessions emphasises their importance to Duggan’s literary development: they “gave Maurice a sympathetic outlet for his capacity to manipulate language and thought, often by coining words” (“Jabberwocky” 3). But Texidor shared this capacity, and its imprint can be seen in the work *both* writers were producing and discussing in this period – prose that rides the boundaries between language, thought and the unconscious. Indeed, Duggan and Texidor can be seen regularly responding to and reflecting back each other’s work during this period. In 1944, Duggan wrote the (unpublished) “Dream of Dreaming”, an extended dream sequence in which a man bludgeons his wife to death;²⁰² a year later, he wrote a sketch entitled “Insistent Anaesthetic” in which he sought to recreate the sensation of anaesthesia. Neither piece survives, but they suggest that Duggan’s repeated spells in hospital during this period, including two traumatic amputations under anaesthetic, were formative experiences he had talked about with Texidor. In turn, she drew on them in “Anyone Home?”, whose protagonist Roy recalls an anaesthetic-fuelled descent “down in[to] wicked silence” (170). When she showed Duggan a draft of this story, he questioned the adequacy of “rubbery darkness” as a metaphor for the sensations he had patently described to her: “I know we did talk about this,” he wrote, “but as an adjective [rubbery] loses its exactness. ... I suppose my feelings were of hemming/closing/encircling rubber darkness”.²⁰³

²⁰² Perhaps this was a rehearsal for the equally murderous “Notes on an Abstract Arachnid” he would write a year later.

²⁰³ Duggan to Texidor, 16 May [1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

In the final story, Texidor defers to Duggan's first-hand experience, with Roy recalling the "the sweet-frigid Godspeed of a false friend on the journey through ether" (170) as a descent into "rubber", not "rubbery" darkness" (174). While the story's anaesthesia passages may have struck Sargeson and others as an unwelcome departure from narrative realism, Texidor's desire to represent her protagonist's induced dream-state with the utmost fidelity to Duggan's experience can be seen as a form of realism too.

The literary cross-fertilisation between Duggan and Texidor would take a further turn when Duggan wrote "Notes on an Abstract Arachnid" for *Speaking for Ourselves*, and packed it with what Richards calls "the surrealist hyperbole of Lorca" (78).²⁰⁴ As I have noted, Sargeson initially disliked the story intensely and clearly associated Duggan's studied excursions into the dark unconscious with Texidor's similar manoeuvres in "Anyone Home?": "Maurice and Greville – oh dear oh dear. ... GLOOM. Quite overpowering sometimes. And it does get into their writing so much," he wrote in dismay to E.P. Dawson of their contributions.²⁰⁵ Elsewhere, Sargeson insisted he was not averse to surrealist and non-realist writing in itself, even though it was very different from his own "re-arrangement of reality which is accessible to everyone". He was, for example, full of admiration for Janet Frame's "dreamlike and visionary" prose (Shieff, *Letters* 199).²⁰⁶ In the case of Texidor and Duggan, though, he considered their dream-drenched and heavily symbolic prose merely pretentious.²⁰⁷ As I have noted in chapter 5, he dismissed "Anyone Home?" as a piece of self-indulgent private code, an act of hubris by an aspiring writer who had forgotten "that the god only speaks through them, they're not the god themselves".²⁰⁸ It is not hard to imagine his reaction to "Trees and Days", were he ever shown it; ironically, the remaining fragments are typed on the back of some of Sargeson's own drafts.

²⁰⁴ The Texidor-Duggan correspondence reveals that the two were reading Lorca together, and Duggan would regularly comment on Texidor's translations of the Spanish poet. See, for example, Duggan to Texidor, 5 November 1944. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

²⁰⁵ Sargeson to Dawson, 18 May 1945. Dawson, Letters, MS-2404/002. HC.

²⁰⁶ Even if he never ceased to wish "she would become readable – even if only 5 per cent more" (Sargeson to Plomer, 23 June 1964, quoted in Alexander 38).

²⁰⁷ By the time Sargeson came to write his autobiography, however, he was more kindly disposed towards at least some of Texidor's surrealist writing. He praised the "extraordinary virtuosity" of the language in "Santa Cristina", for example; "a kind of surrealist technique if you like, but done without the blurring and imprecision one may often find in dream-language writing" (*Never* 64).

²⁰⁸ Sargeson to Duggan, 19 May 1945. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-08. ATL.

Developing a language that read like poetry but did the job of prose (the complete inverse, in fact, of Sargeson's method) was one of the major technical challenges Texidor faced as she began writing. Another was building a structure for her material. "I have the greatest difficulty in finding 'stories' [with] any sort of framework for the feelings I have," she confessed to Duggan in an undated letter from this period.²⁰⁹ The material she mines in her European stories presented particular structural challenges. How could she turn the chaos, disintegration and discontinuity of war – which one critic has termed "the highly charged emblem of a moral, psychological, and existential paralysis of thought" (Stonebridge 194) – into a coherent narrative without destroying or 'tidying up' the inherent unruliness of her material? This is the challenge she confronts in "Time of Departure". Set in the aftermath of war, the story is narrated by a psychologically-damaged young woman for whom survival has brought not a sense of triumph, but pain and guilt. She waits in an unnamed port city to board the ship that will convey her to a new life. Through a fractured, non-sequential narrative, we glimpse the events that have brought her to this point: a suicide attempt, a spell in a sanatorium, a journey into Spain with her lover Jan to fight fascism, a crucial encounter with a sinister railway official who may or may not have hypnotised her. A slip of the tongue while being questioned – an insignificant act, "a private misadventure" (121) – has triggered extreme consequences and "changed the rational world [she] knew to chaos" (129), condemning Jan to death in the process. Now, the narrator is numb and alone, possessing only her "patient tragic suitcases", her shame and an abiding fear of persecution by a nameless "Them" (130). There is little authorial narrative in this Kafkaesque tale; some of the narrator's past experiences emerge in dreams, while the reader must reconstruct others out of her broken conversations with a psychologist (seemingly in the story's present) and with Jan and others in a remembered past. Sometimes we are in Switzerland, sometimes in Paris, sometimes on the Spanish border. Tenses switch; speakers change mid-sentence; language sometimes breaks down completely – "It snapped ... a voice broke ... it began to groan and gabble" (120; ellipses in original). Chronology, clarity and explication are deliberately withheld in a narrative that seeks to embody, not simply describe, a nightmarish post-war world glimpsed "through the smoke of burning Europe" in which "[c]omrades and oppressors" have been engulfed (121). A couple of repeated motifs – a doomed insect trying to crawl up the side of a cracked basin, the banal wallpaper in the narrator's studiously neutral hotel room "that does not change with my travels, that does not belong to any climate or

²⁰⁹ Texidor to Duggan, undated [1944?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

country” (118) – seem intended to signal the passing of time, but ultimately offer the reader little assistance.

“Time of Departure” was one of two drafts Texidor sent Duggan in mid-1945. He praised the first, “Reconstruction”, as another “bloody good” story. It too concerns a damaged survivor trying to make meaning of the past among the ruins of war, although here the setting is Italy, where the narrator and her missing lover have been fighting with the anti-fascist resistance. But of “Time of Departure”, he said: “This is the first of yours I have not been sure of”. He sensed that something (perhaps Texidor’s experiment with Proustian “inflorescence”) had been “extended too far”; the story lacked momentum and, above all, coherence. Duggan suggested cuts, including the recurrent image of the struggling bug in the basin, but seemed unconvinced that they would address the fundamental problems. The story “is in some way too thin”, he thought, “stretched beyond the point where it is still whole”.²¹⁰

The quest for narrative ‘wholeness’ had of course preoccupied modernist prose writers since the end of the First World War, from Joyce and Woolf to Lawrence and Hemingway. How might a meaningful whole arise from fragments, from the chaos of mass warfare and its messy detritus? Could the passage of time or the elasticity of individual consciousness be fixed on the page? What kind of ‘story’ could be created through indirect or opaque narrative strategies; could the intrusive scaffolding of plot be dispensed with altogether? “Time of Departure” is not the only story in which Texidor can be seen wrestling with these questions, with varying degrees of success. Among the pieces she abandoned is “Time Exposure”.²¹¹ Like “Time of Departure”, it both enacts and describes the broken post-war lives of its protagonists, European refugees living in an unnamed South American city, and adopts a tone that veers unnervingly between horror and comedy. Fragments of the characters’ pasts and presents are flung together in a narrative that, like the floorboards of the shabby apartment they occupy, comprises largely yawning gaps – or, as Texidor herself described them to Duggan, “hiatus lagoons lacuna”.²¹²

²¹⁰ Duggan to Texidor, undated. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

²¹¹ Manuscripts of all the unpublished stories mentioned in this paragraph and the next (“Time Exposure”, “Aller Retour” and its variants “The Thirteenth Hour” and “The Telegram”) are held at the University of Auckland Library. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 2, Folders 5 and 6.

²¹² Texidor to Duggan, undated. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

Another abandoned story, “Aller Retour” (and other variously titled drafts that seem to be variants of it) – is an assemblage of intensely-felt memories and moments, snatches of conversation (some in French), short lyrical passages, unexplained leaps in time, place and narrative perspective, and an inescapable odour of Jean Rhys.²¹³ It features two sisters, a hotel room in Paris, a lover who is sometimes present and sometimes dead, a lost telegram and GIs drinking champagne at the Eiffel Tower. Duggan found its uncompromising opacity hugely attractive: “you demand as much from the reader as I do ... [It is] really specialist writing ... in that it will have a special reader”.²¹⁴ But he was unsure if it adequately rewarded the reader’s perseverance, even one willing to negotiate its unfathomable lacunae. Like “Time of Departure”, he felt “Aller Retour” lacked wholeness and was choked by a weight of unchecked and inarticulate feeling that rendered it all but inaccessible. “I have tried to understand [it] and understand now nothing but words ... because of a facet which is not allowed to come through, and which inhibits the content and renders it too personal.... It fills me full of feeling. Not intellection”.²¹⁵ For all Duggan’s appetite for literary experimentation and difficulty, he clearly retained some conventional reading expectations – he wanted to see, to understand and to be convinced, as well as to feel.

Unpublished and unfinished work must necessarily be critiqued with caution. But stories such as “View from Mount Calvary”, “Time Exposure” and “Aller Retour” warrant attention because they show that Texidor was, in the mid-1940s, still very much an apprentice, still trying her hand with borrowed models, still finding ways to harness her innate literary impulses and to reconcile what Sargeson called “the two Grevilles”.²¹⁶ Like Sargeson, she

²¹³ There are strong echoes of Rhys’s *Good Morning Midnight* (1939), with which “Aller Retour” shares a tone of sardonic bitterness, an unanchored and forsaken protagonist, and a vividly-rendered Left Bank setting. Particular details also recall *Quartet* (1928), Rhys’s reworking of her complicated relationship with Ford Madox Ford and his wife in the period when her own husband was imprisoned in Paris (1923-24). The wallpaper in the rickety hotel room of Texidor’s protagonist, for example, depicts “gilded birds nesting in a profusion of purple flowers that distill the passagery scent of lovers ... The birds have withdrawn into the bowers on the dark walls”; in the room of Rhys’s Marya, “An atmosphere of departed and ephemeral loves hung about the bedroom like stale scent ... The wallpaper was vaguely erotic – huge and fantastically shaped mauve, green and yellow flowers sprawling on a black ground” (Rhys, *Quartet* 87). However, I have been unable to find any direct evidence that Texidor was familiar with Rhys’s fiction – which was anyway largely forgotten after the Second World War, until the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966 (Angier 67) – despite the striking affinities between the women and their work.

²¹⁴ Duggan to Texidor, undated [1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

²¹⁵ Duggan to Texidor, undated [1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

²¹⁶ One Greville, he suggested, was evident in the “private” symbolic language and interiority of “Anyone Home?” The other, presumably, was the more disciplined and intelligible author of leaner, less

too wanted to invest her prose with “disguised poetry” (*More* 92), although hers would always remain more overtly poetic than her mentor’s. But she also recognised that “poetic” prose could readily become florid over-writing, a weakness she was quick to diagnose in others. She described Duggan’s “That Long, Long Road” as “so overloaded with words as to be quite opaque in places” and cautioned him, “if you are wallowing in all this lovely stuff [make sure] you don’t fall into utter garrulity”. His unpublished “Saint Louis Blues”, a forerunner to “The Blues for Miss Laverty”, had too much in it, she wrote: it was “like a cake made entirely of raisins – it ceases to be a cake if you know what I mean.”²¹⁷ When Duggan, Sargeson or others pointed to similar defects in her own writing, Texidor was willing to pare it back and redraft fastidiously. The best of her European work – “Santa Cristina”, “Jesús Jiménez”, “Maaree”, *These Dark Glasses* – reflects this discipline. But she seems to have found structural reworking less palatable. “I am always ready to cut out redundancies or any parts where I haven’t communicated what I intended,” she wrote in response to Sargeson’s critique of “Time of Departure”, “but structural alterations are rather hopeless”.²¹⁸ Perhaps she found the process arduous, or perhaps she was reluctant to sacrifice her signature “hiatus lagoons lacuna[e]” simply to make her prose more accessible. In any event, she was more likely to abandon stories (such as “View from Mount Calvary” and “Aller Retour”) altogether than subject them to wholesale restructuring.

The New Zealand stories

When Texidor first started writing fiction, it seems 1930s Europe remained more real and urgent to her than the Paparoa farmland she could see through the window: “Why do the war stories seem much more immediate?” she wrote in an undated diary note. “Can’t a story be written about NZ?”²¹⁹ Under pressure from Sargeson, she found it could. Ultimately, more of her New Zealand stories were published than those set in Europe. Four appeared in journals soon after they were written. Two, “An Annual Affair” and “Home Front”, also featured in

“feminine” stories such as “An Annual Affair” and even “Santa Cristina” (Sargeson to Duggan 19 May 1945. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-08. ATL).

²¹⁷ Texidor to Duggan, two undated letters [1944 and 1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL. Duggan was aware of his own prolix tendencies: after writing her a letter while drunk, he commented with astonishment on the “great proliferation of words” he had poured forth, “an undisciplined welter of boom and bravura”. Duggan to Texidor, 24 March 1959. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1, Folder 2. UA

²¹⁸ Texidor to Duggan, Thursday [?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

²¹⁹ Unpublished workbook. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1, Folder 7. UA.

landmark anthologies of short fiction published in Texidor's lifetime and later.²²⁰ It is thus largely on the strength of the New Zealand stories that Texidor's work became known to her contemporary readers and subsequently to a wider New Zealand audience.

These stories have more in common than their rural Northland settings. Without exception, they register moments when an insular New Zealand sensibility is disturbed by tremors from the world beyond, or when a foreign gaze falls upon local reality for a brief, uncomprehending and discomfiting moment. A radio is switched on in an isolated farmhouse on the Kaipara Harbour and immediately "the shell of the house [is] filled with world echoes" ("Elegy", *Fifteen Minutes* 191). In the same story, a visitor to the farm finds her eyes wandering over the striking but featureless landscape: "There wasn't any place they wanted to rest. It might have been this that made the weekends so long. You could sleep, of course; but there wasn't any place you wanted to rest" (190). At such moments, Texidor shows her reader how New Zealand looks to an outsider, an alien land seen through alien eyes – a strange, disturbing and often desolate place. Indeed, her New Zealand is not unlike that anatomised in 1943 by another cosmopolitan European visitor, Anna Kavan, in "New Zealand: Answers to an Inquiry" (see chapter 1.5 above). But it also corresponds with the vision of New Zealand enshrined in the nationalist anti-myth – the occupied but essentially uninhabited environment in which there is "never a soul at home" ("House and Land", Curnow, *BNZV* 1945 159). Once this kinship is acknowledged, Texidor becomes something more than an exotic outsider injecting a splash of colour into the New Zealand literary landscape. For all her exoticism, she is writing from a position similar to that of Sargeson and other mid-century writers who understand that while they live in the same place as their compatriots, they are living in it very differently.²²¹ Patrick Evans considers "Texidor's New Zealand is imagined with an intensity of emptiness that *only an alien* can see" (my italics, Evans, *History* 143). But in fact the period produced many such literary representations, very

²²⁰ "An Annual Affair" appeared in Dan Davin's *New Zealand Short Stories* (1953), the first New Zealand volume in the Oxford University Press series "The World's Classics" (republished in 1976), and "Anyone Home?" in Sargeson's *Speaking for Ourselves* (1945). In more recent anthologies, "Home Front" was included in Vincent O'Sullivan's *Oxford Book of New Zealand Short Stories* (1992) and "Anyone Home?" in the *Penguin Book of New Zealand War Writing* (2015), edited by Gavin McLean and Harry Ricketts. An extract from "Goodbye Forever" appeared in *The Auckland University Press Anthology of New Zealand Literature* (2012), edited by Jane Stafford and Mark Williams.

²²¹ I borrow this phrase from Hugh Roberts's essay on Curnow's *A Book of New Zealand Verse: 1923-45* (1945). Roberts discusses Curnow's use of a passage from James Joyce's *Ulysses* in which the hapless Bloom defines a nation as "the same people living in the same place. ... Or also living in different places" (Roberts, "Same" 231).

few of them by 'aliens'. Clearly, it is unnecessary to be a foreigner to imagine local reality in those terms.

The first of the New Zealand stories to be published was "Home Front" (1942). Perhaps with an eye to overseas publication (it would be published in Britain a year later), its protagonist is a visitor to New Zealand whose imaginative home lies elsewhere. Rex is a veteran of the Spanish Civil War, presumably English, visiting the elderly Quaker parents of his dead comrade Jim on their isolated farm north of Auckland. Throughout, Texidor seems to keep firmly in mind Sargeson's counsel against excessive lyricism, reining in her prose so that it illuminates, rather than smothers, what she wishes to convey. From the outset, she concentrates on establishing the melancholy emptiness of a landscape seen through the eyes of an outsider. Intimations of futility and death, often expressed through biblical language, are everywhere. As Rex's train approaches the unattended country station, he sees "dead trees littering the hillside ... like white bones", hills rise like "[l]ittle green calvaries" (*Fifteen Minutes* 181), a sudden burst of rain recedes "leaving a dead stillness behind, and the rain quietly falling" (185). The Chapmans' neat farmhouse is quietly atrophying too: the visitor's room "h[olds] the cold of an entire winter", the bathroom with its "coffin-shaped bath" is also where Mrs Chapman stores her preserves, and "bottles of petrified plums and jam" (182) fill the shelves. Even the Chapman family themselves seem moribund and oddly dissociated from their immediate environment, let alone the world beyond, as if already halfway to the afterlife. Jim's father Isaiah speaks in strange biblical cadences – "You see yon trees ... I have seen them all grow," he intones while showing Jim the farm (185). Over dinner, he seems to look at Rex "from a long way off. He said something about Spain. ... But when Rex began to argue the point he was not listening" (184). Later, Rex sees a "milky pallor" flood the old man's face "like the first waves of death lapping over him, and receding so gently that he was unaware" (185).

Through this accretion of melancholy images, Texidor establishes a stark contrast between Rex's desolate New Zealand – in which he is a stranded observer, unable to participate in a life he cannot understand – and Spain, a place with which he was intensely, viscerally engaged. That remembered world remains vital and exuberant, saturated with colour and activity. There, the sun still shines on whitewashed walls, the midday silence is full of life and potency, "a fat red flower burst its sheath with a silent explosion", wine drunk from a peasant's wine skin falls in a "crimson trickle that floods his teeth" (183). Even these

intimations of violence are more attractive than the etiolated gloom of the New Zealand countryside and the insularity of its inhabitants, who seem to Rex indifferent to the urgent clamour of the war-torn world and also “out of focus” (184). The Chapmans’ inability to comprehend Spain or the nature of Jim’s death (as pacifist Quakers, they are shocked to learn he died in combat) is symptomatic of a kind of communal myopia.

Sargeson found “Home Front” an “attractive” story that demonstrated its author’s “accurate observation, an ear for New Zealand speech, and the beauty of its pictorial detail” (“Greville Texidor” 136). Given that it was published less than two years after Texidor arrived in New Zealand and began writing fiction, it seems her visual imagination and acute ear for the nuances of speech (honed, perhaps, by her theatrical experience and skills as a raconteur) had developed rapidly. Equally, Sargeson’s remarks about the story’s weaknesses – “the somewhat crude black-and-white contrast” between the Spanish and New Zealand passages, a contrived surprise ending (“Greville Texidor” 136) – point to her struggles with narrative coherence and structure. Certainly the contrast between Rex’s immediate environment (gloomy, drab, devoid of life and energy) and his Spanish past (vibrant and vital) is realised with no great subtlety, and the transition between the two is heavily signposted: “Thinking of Spain Rex saw the sun on the white wall of a house” (182). At the story’s end, Rex finds the Chapmans expect him to stay permanently to work on the farm as a kind of surrogate son – an abrupt and economically-delivered twist that feels both shocking yet somehow inevitable. Perhaps more than anything, the ending suggests Texidor had paid close attention to Sargeson’s more gothic stories, such as “A Great Day” (1937), “Sale Day” (1939) and “I’ve Lost My Pal” (1938), all of which take a similarly dark closing turn. Sargeson found the ending of “Home Front” contrived, but surely it is no more so than Victor in “Sale Day” thrusting the cat into the hot stove, and is arguably less consciously striving to shock.

In “Home Front”, then, the collision between parochial New Zealand and the wider world is rather obviously engineered: an outsider arrives bearing news from elsewhere that is comprehended dimly, if at all. Texidor uses a similar device in “An Annual Affair” where the chaos of wartime Europe briefly erupts into the complacent world of a small rural community. However, the agent of disruption here is not strictly an outsider, but an insider who has chosen to move away: Jim, the university student who has returned home for the annual Boxing Day picnic. Convinced that the war will pave the way for wholesale social revolution, and determined to get to Europe so he is “on the spot when the big things happen”

(165), Jim represents a challenge to a community politely resistant to any sort of change or progress. Apart from the central character, Joy, they regard him with a mix of derision and bafflement – “Dad reckoned that scholarship he won hadn’t done him much good. He had just picked up a lot of weird ideas” (160). Texidor does not depict Jim with any great sympathy, either, suggesting his prophecy of world revolution is as naïve and unlikely to eventuate as Joy’s final, guardedly hopeful observation that “everything might be different next year” (169). Of course what might be different next year, Texidor hints over her characters’ heads, is that the war-hungry Jim might not be here at all. As in “Time of Departure”, she suggests that war will swallow up idealists and villains, comrades and oppressors with equal indifference.

Perhaps the most stylistically accomplished and consistent of all the New Zealand stories, “An Annual Affair” is also the safest and the most conspicuously anchored in the Sargeson tradition. It has been likened to A.P. Gaskell’s slightly later “School Picnic” (1947),²²² which also dissects the undercurrents of a seemingly convivial community picnic, although Gaskell goes further in exploring the fissures between Māori and Pākehā. The stories’ mutual resonances are emphasised in Dan Davin’s *New Zealand Short Stories* (1953) where they are placed alongside each other, an arrangement that perhaps contributed to a perception of Texidor as yet another “enslaved disciple” and imitator of Sargeson’s.

Certainly, “An Annual Affair” seems to have benefited from Sargeson’s close attention. As I have already noted, he advised Texidor to switch the narrative viewpoint from a barely credible first-person to third. The finished story shows her growing technical assurance. Although now cast in the third person, Texidor convinces us that the narrating voice is still that of the artless teenager Joy. The story is seemingly restricted by her immature vision and responses, sometimes lapsing into inarticulate agonies of adolescent feeling: “Joy felt hot all over. As if something awful might happen” (164). Of course, Texidor is in the driving seat throughout, reaching over Joy’s shoulder to pluck out the telling visual details and manipulate the dialogue so that we glimpse something dark and disturbing beneath the cliché-ridden exchanges Joy reports. Respectable Reverend Allum reveals himself as an arrogant hypocrite, recycling falsehoods and platitudes: “I like to think of this little affair as a sort of commemoration. The settlers in these parts landed here,” he opines to the picknickers, conveniently airbrushing the history of conflict between the settlers and those they displaced

²²² For example, by Lydia Wevers in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature* (233).

(164). Joy's mother is a stickler for propriety but her explosive response to a moment of truthfulness reveals the depths of her unhappiness. When everyone professes concern about Dad's whereabouts, their young son Terry correctly suggests that he is "drinking beer in the hotel": his mother promptly gives him "such a crack on the side of the head that he couldn't even yell for a minute or two (167). The prosaically-recounted moment barely registers with Joy, but the reader recoils from its ugliness.

In "An Annual Affair", Texidor's gaze is both microscopic and telescopic. Like Gaskell, she captures the intimate workings of a small rural New Zealand community whose respectability and unquestioned habits disguise a morass of tensions and unarticulated emotion. In this sense, her aim is totally consistent with the local critical realist tradition. But Texidor also denatures her material, imbuing it with an unreality that is absent from Gaskell's story. Recognisable small-town New Zealand is here made strange and a little horrifying: this is not the world according to Joy after all, but the vision of a critical and excluded observer who does not particularly like what she sees. This implied author's eye falls on everything that makes this ostensibly perfect day, and the community unity it supposedly celebrates, just a little "off": the weather is squally, this year's Christmas cake disappointingly plain, flirtatious Miss Jenkins's slacks a bit too well-fitting. Even the landscape is complicit. The tide is wrong for swimming, while the Māori lands across the inlet look "empty and strange", although softer and more intriguing than the bright metallic-hued pastures of "the properly fertilised paddocks" on the Pākehā side (165-166). The social world, too, is marred by an unruliness that must be tidied up and made more respectable: skirts must be pulled down, dirty frocks changed, false teeth put in place, treats sensibly saved for later. Those who fail to observe conventions are made unwelcome, from Miss Jenkins with her cigarettes and painted fingernails, to the local Māori who are known to be "dirty and carry diseases" (166), to Jim who has the temerity to drink alcohol publicly, direct from the bottle. But from beneath the well-maintained veneer of propriety, something ugly is always threatening to escape which Texidor forces us to confront, even if her characters are reluctant to do so: Mum's angry slap, the hideous "black stumps" visible in the mouth of a grinning boy (165), the old man who ruins a rare moment of happiness by vomiting on the ground near where Joy and Jim sit chatting.

Filled with world echoes

The demarcation between the European and New Zealand stories in *In Fifteen Minutes* invites us to notice their differences more than their similarities. However, there are unmistakeable continuities. One is the consistent bleakness of Texidor's world-view, on the strength of which Dale Benson claims her as New Zealand's most authentic existential writer (discussed further in chapter 9). And Texidor is consistently drawn to the voices and vantage points of the marginalised and vulnerable. Her politics, and her disdain for the triumphalist rhetoric that gives rise to war, colour all the stories. So too do her aesthetics, especially her abiding interest in symbolism. The crucifixes, calvaries and suffering Christ-figures of "Santa Cristina" and "View from Mount Calvary" also appear in "Anyone Home?" and "Home Front", while in the novella *Goodbye Forever*, she explores a different symbolic and mythological language that draws on the Hansel and Gretel story (see Conclusion). And the New Zealand stories provide ample evidence of the same caustic satire that animates *These Dark Glasses*, intermingled here with an occasional note of Sargesonian compassion for her stranded New Zealanders, marooned at the edge of the ocean with only the wind rattling the cabbage trees for company, fearfully resisting whatever lies beyond the horizon.²²³

Stylistically, however, Texidor's New Zealand stories are both more naturalistic and more obviously 'plotted' than the European stories. Whereas the latter are usually located at moments of hiatus and stillness in which the protagonists and the narrative stand trapped, a physical journey gives many of the New Zealand stories their underlying structural framework – the arrival by train of soldiers Roy and Rex in "Anyone Home?" and "Home Front", a weekend visit to a friend's farm in "Elegy", an excursion to the beach in "An Annual Affair". Formally, they take fewer risks than the European work. The chronology is generally orderly; passages of narrative introspection are rarer; leaps in time, place and consciousness more explicitly signalled. Their demotic register has more in common with the Sargeson tradition than with the high modernist mannerisms of stories such as "Time of Departure".

²²³ Indeed, there is occasionally real tenderness, as in the unpublished "Everything's All Done", which centres on a lonely country shop-keeper, her husband dead and her son away at war. At the end of another dreary day, she dreams of the stranger who will arrive to entice her away to a more exciting future or perhaps back to her girlhood in the old country: is the old woman's seductive visitor Death? MS. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 2, Folder 5. UA.

But if the New Zealand stories seem less daring and more derivative than those drawing on Texidor's European past,²²⁴ they also feel more finished and accomplished. Two possible explanations suggest themselves. Firstly, Sargeson may have had more of a hand in ensuring these stories were fit for local publication – not only are they highly polished, but also tailored to the tastes of a local market that favoured readability and 'authenticity' over aesthetic experimentation. If Texidor's redrafting of "An Annual Affair" was typical, we can surmise not only that Sargeson took it upon himself to intervene closely in these stories' composition but also that she was receptive. Perhaps Sargeson felt he had greater licence to intervene when Texidor was writing about the New Zealand scene whose imaginative representation he had come to regard as his own territory, rather than about her own European past. She too may have felt unconfident when writing this new world into life: her correspondence with Duggan shows her willing to take advice about aspects of New Zealand speech and character, and she declared herself completely unable to write a 'New Zealand' novel.²²⁵

Alternatively, the more consistent standard of Texidor's New Zealand stories may reflect the fact that she simply wrote better when working in a more naturalistic vein. I have already noted that she wholeheartedly rejected Twain as a model despite Sargeson's enthusiasm for the American writer's naturalism, economy of language, aversion to literary conceits and "free & easy" storytelling (Shieff, *Letters* 84). Yet, as Texidor's many abandoned drafts attest, sometimes her appetite for linguistic and formal experimentation, for modernist 'difficulty', could outstrip her technical capabilities – especially without recourse to

²²⁴ A reading that is admittedly culturally conditioned. For contemporary New Zealand readers, the sheer exoticism of Texidor's European work perhaps lent it an aura of originality and sophistication that was not necessarily deserved. Duggan, for one, was aware of this risk; after reading one of the Spanish stories (possibly "View from Mount Calvary"), he writes: "I liked [it] very much ... but I realize that the allure of a distant land has influenced me, and sitting back considering as near as possible without the bias of that allure, I think that 'Anyone Home?' is better" (undated, Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL). Professor J.C. Reid, however, refused to be seduced by the exotic setting and Bohemian milieu of Texidor's *These Dark Glasses* when he reviewed it for *Landfall*: as I discuss in 8.1, he dismissed it as a "well-worn and relatively trivial" example of "an outmoded form" ("Review" 378).

²²⁵ As discussed in chapter 5, Duggan initially considered Roy's idiom was too sophisticated for an "average colonial": as he explained, "if [Roy] did begin to think in an original and well-expressed manner he'd immediately pull himself up" to avoid being thought "effeminate". Duggan also identified some 'Americanisms' that needed correcting (Duggan to Texidor, undated [1944?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL). Texidor later reported she was considering entering a short story competition, but knew she "couldn't produce an N.Z. novel for any money". Texidor to Duggan, undated [1944?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

Sargeson's rigorous influence.²²⁶ However much she may have found the idea unpalatable, it may be that Texidor's most successful fiction owes more to Mark Twain than to Marcel Proust.²²⁷

²²⁶ From Australia, she wrote sadly of her tendency to "chuck in the sponge" after writing several unsatisfying drafts. Texidor to Sargeson, June 16 [1950?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-0432-182. ATL.

²²⁷ Along with Lorca, Proust was one of Texidor's favourite authors, and she read his work in French. Sargeson – although he urged Texidor and other protégés to study the work of Twain, Sherwood Anderson and Melville – also regarded Proust as "a very great artist", and told Duggan to study him for his "psychological knowledge" (Sargeson to Duggan, 9 June 1944. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-08. ATL).

CHAPTER 7

“It was she who lost the war”: *Diary of a Militia Woman*

7.1 A protracted gestation

Early in 1945, Greville Texidor told Duggan that the Australian publishers John Reed and Max Harris wanted an option to publish “all [her] work for three years novels and everything (I don’t know how many they think they’re going to get) fifty fifty with the proceeds if any!”. Buoyed by their interest, she was pressing ahead with what she called “the Spanish novel”, her first full-length work, which Reed and Harris wanted her to “sen[d] over in hunks as it comes out of my unconscious, Caramba!” It was “all there”, she told Duggan, but she needed “a month or two” to complete it.²²⁸

Despite her optimism, “the Spanish novel” was still unfinished when Texidor left New Zealand three years later, and remained so when she died nearly twenty years later. Initially titled *Notebook of a Militia Woman*, it had probably been taking shape since soon after she arrived in New Zealand. Rosamunda Droescher believes her mother started writing it shortly after moving to the North Shore from Paparoa and completed a “short first draft” relatively quickly (Derby 100).²²⁹ Drafts held in the State Library of New South Wales support this theory; some are typed on the back of Sargeson’s discarded drafts of *When the Wind Blows* (1945), or drafts of stories Texidor herself wrote in New Zealand, including at Paparoa, or even her daughter Cristina’s typing exercises. But progress on the novel seems to have stalled not long after Texidor’s confident report to Duggan. She returned to it in the early 1950s while living in the Blue Mountains. The extant drafts suggest her aims were now more ambitious; what had begun as a lightly-disguised record of her Civil War experiences was

²²⁸ Texidor to Duggan, two undated letters [April and July 1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

²²⁹ Texidor may even have pursued publication at this point. In January 1945, the London literary agent Laurence Pollinger told Sargeson that Lehmann had decided *These Dark Glasses* was too short to publish in such economically-straitened times. But Pollinger was nonetheless interested in reading the “full length novel” that Texidor had also written, presumably *Notebook* (Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-102. ATL). If Sargeson or Texidor herself did send Pollinger a draft, he may have passed it on to Lehmann. In an undated letter to Duggan (also 1945?) she mentions advice from Lehmann to cut a draft novel in half – again, this could be referring to the Spanish novel, or to an expanded version of “Goodbye Forever” that remains unpublished (see pp234-235). Texidor to Duggan, undated [1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

now repurposed, becoming a richer, more nuanced and more equivocal work of imaginative fiction. But even as she reworked her material, Texidor's writing was growing ever more inhibited – by depression, anxiety, guilt about what she had done and failed to do by taking up arms for Republican Spain, and what would probably now be diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder. She was also struggling with potentially clashing literary aims: was the novel an exercise in therapy and personal confession, or political art, or a 'serious' work of literature? While she continued to write with sometimes ferocious intensity, she grew despondent at her lack of tangible progress without Sargeson's unique blend of encouragement, prescription, practical support and sheer interest. By the time Texidor quit Australia for Spain in 1953, she had abandoned the novel, having told Sargeson: "it may be that I can't write a full length novel. I wasted a lot of time on that Spanish one".²³⁰ In announcing she had put aside the work that had begun so promisingly, she was effectively renouncing her writing career altogether.

But the novel, by now titled *Diary of a Militia Woman* (the title by which I refer to it from now on), refused to stay abandoned. It was among the papers returned to Werner Droescher after Texidor's death. Seemingly acknowledging the manuscript's haphazard condition, she had left with it an instruction: "To you who find this work put it in whichever order you wish and arrange it as you will" (Derby 101). On a visit to Paris in 1973, Droescher discussed the manuscript with the exiled Spanish writer Abel Paz, chronicler of the Spanish revolution and an authority on Catalan anarcho-syndicalism. Paz "was quite excited", recalled Droescher, as it would be "the only semi-documentary book on the anarchist scene written by a woman".²³¹ Encouraged by Paz's interest, Droescher revised the draft and tried, unsuccessfully, to find a publisher in Europe or England. In 1978, he sought help from British author Phillip Toynbee, who had recently edited an anthology of Civil War writing. Toynbee read the manuscript with considerable pleasure, calling it "a most vivid piece of writing ... [that] deserves to be widely read", but could not offer any practical assistance.²³²

²³⁰ Texidor to Sargeson, 26 December [1954?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-182. ATL.

²³¹ W. Droescher to Phillip Toynbee, 25 September 1978. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 21. SLNSW.

²³² Toynbee to W. Droescher, 25 October 1978. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 21. SLNSW.

After Werner died in 1978, Rosamunda Droescher became the unpublished novel's champion. Working with her former husband, the Australian poet Martin Harrison, and with advice from Abel Paz, she reassembled and extensively revised Texidor's original drafts, adding new material as well. She corrected factual errors, especially those that would be obvious to a Spanish readership, and continued her mother's effort to enlarge the scope of the novel beyond the semi-documentary.²³³ Rosamunda's version of the novel, titled *Shadows of War*, sets Texidor's material within a framing narrative that connects it to Rosamunda's own history, her problematic relationship with her mother and her discovery of the original manuscript after Texidor's death. At the time of writing, *Shadows of War* still awaits publication.

Reflecting its protracted gestation and complicated provenance, *Diary* is an uneven, sometimes inchoate and frustratingly disjointed manuscript. It lacks the coherence and unity of a work produced over a concentrated period and animated by a sustained artistic vision. Yet it nonetheless merits attention, both for its own sake and as a kind of ur-text, an aggregation of the concerns and anxieties that resonate repeatedly throughout Texidor's fiction, all leading back to the Spanish war – betrayal, displacement, estrangement.

She rehearsed many of these tropes in the short stories she was writing at the same time as *Diary*: indeed, some of the same characters, incidents and images appear in both the long and short fiction.²³⁴ In some short stories, wartime Spain is framed simply as the exotic elsewhere, romantic and passionate – a representation perhaps intended to satisfy a sympathetic New Zealand audience (including Sargeson) for whom reading Texidor was a chance to vicariously experience what was already being mythologised as the century's "Last Great Cause" (Weintraub 313). In "Home Front", for example, Texidor proffers a glimpse of scenic Civil War Spain, vital and visceral, imbued with Lorcaesque poetry, a place where people fight and die and drink from wine skins in the midday sun surrounded by the "exuberant smell of flowers and frying" (*Fifteen Minutes* 183). But in *These Dark Glasses*

²³³ Interview with Rosamunda Droescher, 3 December 2014.

²³⁴ The child who features in "Jesús Jiménez", for example, appears in another guise in *Diary*, voicing the same bloodthirsty agitprop; *Diary*'s central character's packed suitcases signal her decision to abandon – and perhaps betray – the cause she has fought for, just as they do for the narrator of "Time of Departure"; echoing "Santa Cristina", a minor character in *Diary* dreams of a shellfish "with an eye like a sea snail", an image later subsumed into a dream of death, where "fear lay cold, looking up with a cold black eye, the eye of the shellfish" (Folder 1d). Texidor's refusal to date her drafts makes it impossible to determine which iteration came first.

and other short fiction that remained unpublished in her lifetime – including “Maaree”, “At Home and Alone”, “Jesús Jiménez” and “San Toni” – Texidor offers a more politically and aesthetically nuanced account of Spain. She draws on a variety of registers (colloquial, lyrical, satirical) and styles (symbolism, surrealism, realism), and positions herself at varying distances from her subject matter, sometimes intimately immersed in it, sometimes detachedly observant. Various, she writes about, against, in support of, from within and outside the war. Suffering is not its only legacy: the war has also allowed her characters a fleeting sense of community, connection, purpose and even stability. Without exception, though, these pleasures are narrated retrospectively, already suffused with failure, bitterness and disenchantment. Like the work of Rosamond Lehmann – another mid-century Englishwoman intently attuned to war’s personal and social consequences – Texidor’s Spanish fiction enacts what Judy Simons calls Lehmann’s “double-edged and subtle slippage between tragedy and joy” as it registers both an “equivocal sense of life’s excitement and its corollary, suffering” (Simons 9). In Texidor’s case, there is also “slippage” between tragedy and dark comedy. Describing a wartime funeral in Barcelona (in “Maaree”), the narrator’s eye takes in not only the crowds of weeping women but also the absurd grandiloquence of the anarcho-sindicalist slogans: “The procession moved like a black river, bearing banners like boats. Conquer Or Die (Carpenters Union) was swept along on the flood. They Shall Not Pass (United Hairdressers) faltered and came to a halt before me” (*Fifteen Minutes* 115). In *These Dark Glasses*, a political refugee’s tragic back-story – an escape from prison, the disappearance of his wife – is also a “thrilling” tale of a “life riddled with danger” avidly consumed by the armchair revolutionaries for whom leftist politics are a passing fashion. Declares one such fellow traveller: “Everyone’s going Trotskyist this season” (61–63).

Yet the short fiction provided Texidor with a necessarily limited canvas on which to reimagine her Spanish experiences. *Diary* gave her room for the more searching exploration and expiation she sought.²³⁵ When the novel opens in the winter of 1936, its young protagonist Magda²³⁶ and her English husband Martin are living in the artists’ colony of

²³⁵ In the following discussion, all quotes are sourced from various folders in Box 1 of Texidor’s papers held at the State Library of New South Wales (MLMSS 5235). References to specific folders are provided in the text, in parentheses.

²³⁶ In some drafts, Magda is called Marga or Margaret; elsewhere Texidor experiments with Clare, Eve, Em and Kay (her ultimate preference for ‘Magda’ may reflect the overlay of biblical imagery which becomes increasingly visible in successive drafts). Martin is sometimes called Jan. The Cruz brothers, with whom Magda becomes romantically entwined, have numerous alternative names – Liberto, Progreso, Pedro, Juan, Garcia and more. For clarity, I have used the characters’ names as they appear

Turissa²³⁷ on the Costa Brava. Of mixed English and Argentinian descent, Magda is determinedly non-political, more interested in renovating the couple's farmhouse than in rumours of the Republican Government's impending collapse. But when the Nationalist rebellion begins, the idealistic Martin decides to take up arms for the Republic, enlisting with the small Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM). At the same time, a land dispute with a local peasant forces the couple to abandon their house, and Magda follows Martin to Barcelona. There she works as a translator and gets to know Republican supporters of all complexions – the anarcho-syndicalists who now control the city, doctrinaire communists from Spain and abroad, ardent foreign volunteers, middle-class locals who fear the anarchists' rumoured ferocity and godlessness. But Magda is increasingly drawn into the wider anarchist community through the Cruz family, whose sons are prominent in the movement. Magda travels to the Aragón front where Martin has been posted, persuades him to leave the POUM in favour of an anarchist militia, gets rid of the young German volunteer he has taken as his lover, and enlists alongside her husband (commandeering her rival's sought-after rifle in the process). She is soon in battle, including at Almdévar where Martin is killed. After a brief and unhappy stay in England, Magda returns to Barcelona and rekindles her connections with the Cruz family, becoming Pedro's lover. But by this time, the Republican cause is in chaos: Moscow-aligned communists control the government, other leftist factions are being suppressed and the anarchists are increasingly marginalised. Internecine street fighting breaks out, Pedro is killed in suspicious circumstances, and soon Barcelona is under bombardment by the nationalists and their fascist allies. Magda keeps working as a translator, has a desperate affair with Pedro's brother Liberto, and is eventually evacuated on a warship back to Britain. She is later depicted working there in an orphanage, exhausted, unstable, distraught with guilt: "A traitor. She lost the war. It was she who lost the war" (Folder 5).

Although Texidor seems to have conceptualised and held fast to this basic plot from the outset, she continually experimented with structure, style, sequence and various narrative frames as she drafted. The resulting "hiatus lagoons lacuna[e]" are familiar from the abandoned short stories, but here they arise less from conscious artistic choices than from the novel's prolonged and sporadic production. Both between and within drafts, Texidor can be

in what I consider Texidor's most finished drafts, although an absence of dates makes sequencing them an inexact science. These are also the names used by Rosamunda Driescher in *Shadows of War*.

²³⁷ The original Roman name for Tossa de Mar.

seen reworking the same material, switching perspectives, recasting register and tone, refashioning incidents to different artistic ends. Anodyne exposition in one draft – “Eve had been nearly two years at the Fonda Lopez. Without having planned it she had just stayed on after a perfect holiday there with Martin. At the week ends they tramped the country looking for a house” – becomes oblique, disjointed or more politically-charged narrative in another (all quotes from Folder 1B). A conventionally descriptive passage –

The ground floor housed a wretched peasant and his wife and a flock of goats and children. The chimney had fallen in and the house was always filled with smoke which covered the walls with a heavy coating of soot. There was little to distinguish the living room from the stable.

– is recast more suggestively in another draft:

The upstairs room rotten floored, uninhabitable, below the wretched peasants, the children, the goats, the chimney fallen in, the place full of smoke, the walls coated with soot, the moving carpet of fleas on the floor, little to distinguish the living room from the stable.

A consciously lyrical narrative voice grows progressively leaner, more austere and more particular: “The moon had gone. The thick night pressed in through the little window. Across the valley a bonfire made a poppy of red on the black”. Characters not only change name from draft to draft, but are effectively reimagined. In some, Magda – who can be reliably read as Texidor’s alter-ego – speaks with the unmistakable inflections of the English upper middle-class: “Good God, look at that ... The Fascists have ever so much more of Spain than we have,” she exclaims brightly, inspecting a map. Over time, though, her voice becomes increasingly individualised and modulated, as Texidor works to free her from the predictable confines of nationality and class – a strategy seen also in the mixed parentage (English and Argentinian) she bestows on Magda in later drafts.

Such recalibrations suggest that Texidor was constantly rethinking her fundamental sense of her characters and the story she was telling. Was this an insider’s story or an outsider’s? Was it to be narrated as lived or observed experience? To what extent was it to be a verifiable account of historical events in which only the names were changed, or an unfettered work of fiction that nonetheless bore the weight of imaginative truth? The novel’s prolonged gestation did not help her resolve these questions; if anything, it served to complicate them. Texidor also found it increasingly difficult to reconcile her conflicting, and by this stage confused literary desires. On the one hand, she yearned to write a clear-eyed, transparent and politically-engaged account of a particular historical moment; on the other, as her many

abandoned drafts demonstrate, she wanted to push aesthetic boundaries by manipulating language, time and consciousness.

7.2 *Diary* and the canon of war writing

By the time Texidor abandoned *Diary*, the first of these impulses held the upper hand. Most of the drafts show it developing into the kind of novel she once told E.P. Dawson she aspired to write: “a sincere but best selling book with a good set of characters who stick to their roles and are firmly wedged between good solid hunks of scenery”.²³⁸ Once finished, it seemed likely to comfortably fulfil the conventions of several genres. It is a classic bildungsroman, for example, charting the personal and political growth of a young woman against the background of war. Initially privileged and politically naïve, Magda is, by the novel’s end, a passionate anarchist, a war-weary miliciana, a widow and an abandoned lover. Consistent with bildungsroman convention, our heroine has achieved maturity and self-knowledge, but at considerable cost: the post-war Magda is deeply damaged, “an excited English woman [whose] ... large unguarded movements contradicted the slightly shrill English voice ... The woman was definitely not normal” (Folder 5; second ellipsis in original).

Like the novellas *Goodbye Forever* and *These Dark Glasses*, *Diary* is also unmistakably a roman à clef. Magda and Martin are recognisable versions of Greville Texidor and Werner Droescher, and their wartime experiences virtually identical. Like Magda, Greville was restoring an old house, Casa Sans, in a valley outside Tossa de Mar when war broke out, utterly absorbed by the “beautiful empty house that waits like an enchanted castle” and dreaming of a future that would never arrive (Folder 1A). Werner, like the “vaguely progressive and pacifist” Martin, was teaching English to university students in Barcelona when he decided to volunteer for the first Republican militia that would have him, the POUM. Greville was pregnant at the outbreak of war; as does Magda, she had an abortion in Barcelona in the heady and uncertain days that followed the anarchist victory in July 1936. Greville and Werner went on to fight at Almudévar, La Zaida and Quinto on the Aragón Front, although, unlike their fictional counterparts, they were not in Barcelona when the anarchists lost control of the city in May 1937. Thinly-disguised friends and acquaintances

²³⁸ Texidor to Dawson, undated [1949?]. MS, Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1, Folder 3. UA.

figure as minor characters throughout the novel. Among the foreigners living in Turissa when war begins are several German Jews, including an architect and the proprietor of the best hotel: Werner came to Tossa to tutor the children of German Jewish émigrés, including a local hotelier. Another Turissa resident is the comically hearty British lady novelist Mrs Peake Wynsome, thought to be based on Nancy Johnstone. Throughout the Civil War, Nancy and her journalist husband Archie managed to keep open the hotel they had built in 1935, leaving Tossa only when the Republic was finally lost.²³⁹ The Lopezes, with whom Magda stays as the novel opens, had their counterparts in a real Tossa family, the Delgardos, who likewise ran an inn and cared for Greville's daughter Cristina when her mother joined the militia. At the front, Magda is treated in a military hospital by a sympathetic English volunteer doctor, Dr Andrews; so too was Greville. Later, in Barcelona – where Magda, like Greville, works as a translator – she meets Kate Simpson, a *Toronto Star* journalist. Greville's own sister Kate came to Spain in 1936 to join her lover, the international brigadist Jan Kurzke, and was variously accredited to both the *Toronto Star* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. Numerous real political figures and activists also populate the novel, though some are disguised – the Barcelona anarchist Conejero brothers become the brothers Cruz,²⁴⁰ the English poet and international brigadist Tom Wintringham is renamed Tom Mann; the anarcho-syndicalist leader Garcia Oliver approves Magda's request to travel to the front; Dos Passos and Hemingway make offstage appearances.

But while *Diary* certainly conforms to the conventions of certain genres, it sits outside several others to which it might be expected to belong. As the work of a female combatant, it occupies a distinctive place in the canon of war writing by women. By the late 1930s the advent of mechanised warfare (particularly the targeting of civilians on a massive scale) had

²³⁹ Nancy Johnstone wrote two books about her experiences, *Hotel in Spain* (1937) and *Hotel in Flight* (1939). In a review, George Orwell described Johnstone's writing as "chirpily facetious" and her books remained largely forgotten until a Barcelona scholar, Miquel Berga, translated them into Catalan in 2011 (Macia; Berga). Orwell's judgment seems unfair. Johnstone's writing is admittedly deeply conventional and sometimes incongruously jolly in tone. But, unlike many foreigners, she remained committed to Tossa throughout the Civil War, staying on to unflinchingly record the war's effects on the town and its residents. In 1938, she and her journalist husband Archie turned their hotel into a home for evacuee children. Disgusted at what they considered the British betrayal of their adopted homeland, they emigrated to Mexico when the war ended (Macia n.p.).

²⁴⁰ According to Rosamunda Droescher, the Conejero brothers, of mixed Andalusian and Catalan origins, were printers whom Greville met when working as a translator in Barcelona in the early days of the Civil War. It was through the Conejeros's influence and intervention that she was able to join the anarchist militia, even though women were by that point in the war technically banned from enlisting (interview with Rosamunda Droescher, 25 April 2015).

destroyed “the emphatic cultural distinction between male activity and female passivity, combatant and non-combatant” that had previously demarcated women’s war writing from men’s, writes Gill Plain (“Women Writers” 166). Notwithstanding this significant shift, Plain argues that women war writers of the 1930s and ’40s – from the mandarin (Virginia Woolf), to the politically-committed (Storm Jameson), to the middle-brow (Mollie Panter-Downes) and even the iconic Vera Brittain²⁴¹ – engaged most frequently and effectively with war “at a remove” rather than by directly exploring its violent prosecution. Even though they did so in extraordinarily diverse ways, these non-combatant writers share some common concerns and strategies. They are typically interested in the reconfiguration of gender roles and relationships forced by war, for example; in women’s complex relationships with the nation, the body politic, and the discourse of patriotism; in the capacity of war, even at a distance, to take hold of the individual psyche and “distort, disrupt, and displace the known parameters of self and society” (Plain, “Women Writers” 176).

Texidor’s novel certainly engages with these questions, too, but it does so rather differently from the non-combatant writers Plain surveys. At least in theory, the Spanish anarchist world she depicts operates according to an entirely different paradigm of gender relations – egalitarian, collaborative, sexually liberated, unfettered by marriage and traditional gender roles (although when Magda first arrives at the front, she seems unsurprised to be given the role of cook).²⁴² As to women’s problematic relationships with the structures of power – the nation, the body politic – Texidor’s treatment is again rather different from other women war writers. Plain argues that women’s traditional exclusion from the public and political realm – an exclusion endorsed by wartime representations reminding them they were “not citizens, but rather essential servants to the male citizen class” – left some women writers uneasy about producing the literature of “commitment and citizenship” the times demanded. Others were considered incapable of doing so. They responded in various ways. Woolf, for example, simply resisted the claims of patriotism and nation, aligning herself instead with a fictitious

²⁴¹ Although it is as a memoirist of the First World War that Brittain is most celebrated, she also confronted the Second in *England’s Hour* (1941). Plain describes this text as a “religio-pacifist morale booster” in which Brittain’s “observer’s prose remains almost clinically detached from the mounting corpses” of blitzed London (*Women’s Fiction* 3).

²⁴² Rosamunda Droscher has also noted that the anarchists’ apparently egalitarian receptiveness to women fighters was short-lived. Not long after the war began, women were banned from joining the militias “at least in part because of the unforeseen enlistment of prostitutes, or those who had recently been prostitutes, in the first militias to go to the Aragón front, with the resultant spread of venereal disease” (in Derby 99).

Outsiders' Society and famously declaring "As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (*Three Guineas* 125). For Woolf, these words are an affirmation of lifelong pacificism and independent thought. But, paradoxically, they also express the position of Magda and indeed Texidor herself – combatants but non-belongers, border-crossing foreigners responding to the plight of the Spanish people, motivated to fight not by the abstract claims of nation or patriotism but by their attachments to specific people and places.

For all these differences, however, *Diary* nonetheless shows some marked stylistic affinities with other war novels written by women. Plain describes the "ironic detachment" of writers she characterises as documentary realists (Monica Dickens, Inez Holden, Mollie Panter-Downes and others): they choose to recount appalling and painful experiences with a "plain-speaking pragmatism" that is "ironically euphemistic, determinedly avoiding what might be termed the emotional 'reality' of war" ("Women Writers" 173). Texidor's recourse to this strategy in *Diary*, most effectively in several eerily disengaged and sometimes absurd scenes set at the front, is discussed below.

If *Diary* sits somewhat outside the conventions of women's war writing, it is also distinctive when considered specifically as a novel of the Spanish Civil War. It certainly has no New Zealand antecedents. Although many local writers were voluble and passionate supporters of the Republican cause, they were virtually silent about the Civil War in their work. According to Lawrence Jones, *Tomorrow* published a few poems (including some by Glover) in 1937 and 1938 (L. Jones, "Bringing It Home" 243). Writing as Whim-Wham, Curnow produced a handful of topical "light poems" that referenced Spain, while Mason wrote a little-known poem memorialising the New Zealand volunteers killed in Spain ("Service for the Fallen", 1939) and Brasch wrote "For the Dead in Spain" in 1937. But apart from the last, none of the poets chose to include these poems in later collections ("Bringing It Home" 241, 249–51). In prose, the only works to engage with the war to any significant degree were journalist Geoffrey Cox's *Defence of Madrid* (1937), a work of literary non-fiction; Texidor's own *These Dark Glasses* (to be discussed later in this section); Dan Davin's short story "The Hydra" (1947); and *Man Alone* (1939), specifically the Civil War back-story John Mulgan grafted onto Johnson's experiences at the request of his publishers. Jones offers several explanations for this near-invisibility. In the late 1930s, the demands of the literary nationalist project were consuming the energies of many leading writers (notably Curnow, Glover and

Brasch) while other likely candidates were committed to anti-fascist conflicts elsewhere (James Bertram and Robin Hyde, for example, both in China). Other writers, including Sargeson, were reluctant to lend their undiluted support to the Republican cause, troubled by what they saw as its manipulation by Stalinist interests.²⁴³ Pressed by Glover to contribute to a fund-raising Civil War anthology he was planning in 1938, Sargeson expressed doubts about both sides in the conflict, characterising them as “a Sovietised tractor driver from Barcelona and a Francoised hidalgo from the South” (quoted in L. Jones, “‘Bringing It Home’” 246). Later, he doubtless gained a rather more sophisticated and nuanced perspective on the war from Texidor. But she shared his despair at the Soviet Union’s expropriation of the Republican cause: the doctrinaire communists and fellow-travellers depicted in *Diary* are without exception unsympathetically drawn, given to diatribes about tractors, harvest statistics and the irredeemable failings of the Spanish people.

Substantial, politically-committed, sometimes impassioned, Texidor’s *Diary* not only occupies a unique place among New Zealand’s scant contributions to the literature of the Civil War.²⁴⁴ Framed by an insider’s understanding of the anarchist cause, it is also a distinctive addition to the larger canon of Civil War writing. My comments here are necessarily confined to Civil War literature written in English, whose limitations and partisan perspectives need to be acknowledged. In a 2014 article sub-titled “How Anglo writers stole the story of the civil war”, historian Jeremy Treglown describes the “mythologising” and “sentimentalis[ing]” tendencies of some of the more celebrated non-Spanish novels arising from the war (52–53). Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, for example, “elevates its military tourists” while distancing and demeaning the Spaniards fighting for their country’s future; moreover, the novel overlooks how “swashbuckling” foreign adventurers such as Robert Jordan may have helped escalate the war rather than win it. Treglown directs readers

²⁴³ Sargeson’s doubts may well have stemmed from his earlier, unsatisfactory flirtation with the Young Communist League. He was expelled in 1933 after voicing dissatisfaction with the “repetitious [and] boring” propaganda they produced under the guise of “literature”. In any event, Michael King describes him as “too much the intellectual subversive and anarchist to tolerate being told what to think and what not to think” (M. King 128–29).

²⁴⁴ Another New Zealand writer associated with the Spanish Civil War, not mentioned by Jones, is the curious figure of George Joseph (1912–89), a Scottish-born but New Zealand-raised journalist, lawyer, Zionist, and prolific author of thrillers and other popular fiction. Although his work does not treat the Civil War directly, he publicly claimed he had fought with the International Brigade and was twice wounded. Joseph’s entry in *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* (1998) refers to this Civil War service, but it has more recently been suggested that it was entirely fabricated and largely ‘borrowed’ from the entirely real experiences of a former schoolmate (Sedley 124).

to the more shaded treatments of the Civil War found in Spanish literature, including novels written under the Franco regime – sometimes with complicity, sometimes with difficulty and sometimes with subversive intent – such as Rafael Sánchez Mazas’s *El Jarama* (*The River*) (Treglown).²⁴⁵

Setting aside that substantial indigenous body of work, the Civil War literature in English encompasses a range of political positions. On the Left alone,²⁴⁶ those positions range from fierce but non-partisan anti-fascism (Louis MacNeice, Hemingway), to ardent Marxism (Edward Upward, Cecil Day Lewis), to unwavering support for the communist Internationale (Claude Cockburn, Rex Warner, John Cornford: see Hoskins, chapters IV and VI). Perhaps some of the finest work is by writers whose convictions shifted along this spectrum according to their personal experiences and developing understanding. A great many of the writers listed above could be counted in this category. Auden’s early convictions, for example, were shaken by his experiences as an ambulance driver in Spain in early 1937, where he found himself unexpectedly disturbed by the closure of churches.²⁴⁷ Such ideological mobility, and its attendant emotions, provide a prime source of literary energy in the war literature as Stanley Weintraub has commented: “the tensions of the committed liberal conscience come to grips with an increasingly complex Cause were clearly more the substance of drama than the rigid orthodoxy of party-line Communism” (60).

But amongst all the nuanced and fluid positions occupied by leftist writers, it is rare to find an anarchist viewpoint, especially in fiction. In other genres, George Orwell’s celebrated

²⁴⁵ By one scholar’s estimate, more than 170 novels written in Spanish, both in Spain and elsewhere, can be classified as Civil War works (see Thomas, *The Novel of the Spanish Civil War, 1936-75*, 250–54). An account of that literature is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.

²⁴⁶ With a few exceptions, there was relatively little literary support for the Nationalist cause among British writers. Those writers who leaned towards Franco included Catholic writers, although the best-known – Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene – were decidedly ambivalent. The poet and Catholic convert Roy Campbell adopted a stridently pro-Nationalist stance in “Flowering Rifle” (1939), a long poem that “very likely lost as many previously uncommitted readers by its fanatical ferocity as it gained by its burning conviction” (Hoskins 77). His friend Wyndham Lewis opposed Britain’s position on Spain, arguing it was blinded by “anti-German sentiment”, but both his polemic *Count Your Dead* and his Spanish-set novel *The Revenge for Love* (both 1937) were “unlikely to have aided materially the Nationalist cause” (Buchanan 160; Hoskins 77).

²⁴⁷ Katherine Bail Hoskins comments that the closed churches Auden saw in Barcelona not only struck him as symptomatic of illiberality and intolerance, but also forced him to acknowledge his vestigial Christianity: “the existence of churches and what went on in them had all the time been very important to me”, he wrote later. Hoskins argues that Auden’s experiences in Spain “helped initiate his return to Christianity” four years later (176).

memoir *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) comes closest. Orwell's experiences in Spain mirrored those of Texidor and Droescher at several points, and they may well have crossed paths at the front or in Barcelona. Like Droescher initially, Orwell served with the POUM on the Aragón front where his *centuria* fought alongside anarchists, and he admired them. Indeed, he returned to Barcelona from Aragón determined to leave POUM and join the anarchists; his intentions were thwarted when the escalating power struggle between leftist factions erupted into all-out street fighting in Barcelona in early May 1937.²⁴⁸ Among writers less actively involved in Spain than Orwell, but nonetheless aligned with the Republican cause, there was also sympathy for the Spanish anarchists. In a 1937 *Left Review* poll of British writers' positions on Spain, Aldous Huxley, for one, declared his admiration for the anarchists in the Republican Government, later justifying his support on the grounds that anarchism sought to "eliminat[e] the beast in man" (quoted in Hoskins 19, 109). The poet Herbert Read was another supporter; he wrote the panegyric "A Song for the Spanish Anarchists" in 1940 and considered anarchism "the only political doctrine which is consistent with the love of justice and our need for freedom", although he subsequently acknowledged the movement's failures in Spain (Weintraub 74–75). However, Hoskins has observed that some writers' enthusiasm for the anarchist cause was less a reflection of political conviction than a romantic fascination with the anarchists' purported "mystical fanaticism, their insistence on personal dignity, and ... total freedom from materialist considerations" that seemed to outsiders to embody "the essence of Spain" (19).

Indeed, this apparent mystique, the sense that Spanish anarchism somehow uniquely expressed the primitive soul of Spain, may well have been part of its initial allure for Texidor. From her first visit to the country, she had been "besotted with the theatricality of Spain" palpable in the poetry of Lorca, in gypsy traditions and in flamenco; it seems she later found a ready correlative for this passion in the "innate theatricality" of the anarchist cause.²⁴⁹ Certainly, she would have acquired a sound intellectual understanding of the movement. Her daughter has observed that, as a foreign *miliciana*, "she couldn't have got away with *not* knowing [the writings of] Kropotkin and Bakunin", the nineteenth-century theorists whose

²⁴⁸ After which the POUM was harshly suppressed by the Moscow-aligned communist leadership now dominating the Republican government. Orwell and many others with POUM affiliations were forced to flee Spain; others were executed or imprisoned.

²⁴⁹ Interviews with Rosamunda Droescher, 29 April 2015 and 4 December 2014.

work helped shape the anarchist movement in Spain.²⁵⁰ Moreover, any over-idealising tendencies are likely to have been reined in by the strongly anti-romantic sensibility prevalent among Catalan anarchists. This pragmatism is captured in *Diary* when the anarchist hero Pedro Cruz tells Magda sternly when she mentions Lorca, “What has he got to do with the Revolution [?] Everyone is reading him because he was killed by the civil guards. But he writes so much about bullfights and gypsies[,] the old Spain of the tourists” (Folder 5). If Texidor shared Magda’s passion for Lorca’s Spain, she would have probably met with similar disapproval from new comrades-in-arms at the front. Nonetheless, it remains likely that her identification with the anarchist cause was, at least initially, as much imaginative and intuitive as intellectual.

The rarity of anarchist perspectives in the literature of the Spanish Civil War – certainly in fiction written in English – makes Texidor’s novel, with its deep immersion in the particularities of Catalan anarchism, even more singular. Historians agree that several “wars within the war” were in progress between 1936 and 1939, with the Civil War subsuming and crystallizing other ideological clashes, some local and others global in origin. Playing out alongside the central war between fascism and democracy were other conflicts that were both highly local and internationally resonant: clashes between landowners and workers, Church and State, tradition and progress, capitalism and labour, Stalinist communism and communist movements not aligned with Moscow, between the rural world and the urban (Casanova 11). In Barcelona, Catalonia’s long-standing struggle for cultural and political independence from Castilian rule added another important dimension, and Texidor’s novel is keenly alert to this local context – although she sometimes struggles to integrate it as anything other than expository digression.

Diary is also distinctive among much Civil War literature in English by virtue of its equivocal political intent. Both Hoskins and Weintraub identify political intent – the conviction that literature can and should be used as a political weapon and an agent of social change – as a distinctive characteristic of writing about the Civil War. This is especially true

²⁵⁰ Interview with Rosamunda Driescher, 4 December 2014. The complex and fascinating origins of Spanish anarchism and its specifically Catalan variant lie beyond the scope of this thesis. In brief, they draw on multiple local and international influences, including Steiner’s educational philosophies, the Rationalist tradition, the British trade union movement, naturism, vegetarianism and the Quaker movement. The first anarchist communities in Spain were in fact non-church Christian communities, not dissimilar to Quakers: *Diary* repeatedly alludes to affinities between Spanish anarchists and early Christians. Clearly, Texidor’s understanding of the movement’s origins and connections was well-informed.

of literature written at the beginning of the conflict when it still seemed possible that an educated, mobilised international movement could help the Spanish Left defeat fascism. That sense of urgent political purpose, of a fervent belief in the utility of literature to “propagate ideas”, beats loudly throughout the iconic works (Hoskins 244). It is heard in the celebrated poetry – Auden’s “poets exploding like bombs” as they embrace “to-day the struggle” (“Spain”, 1937, in Spender and Lehmann 55–58), or John Cornford’s plea to his countrymen in “Full Moon at Tierz” (1936) to ensure Spain’s “agony was not in vain” (Spender and Lehmann 26–29). It also animates the work of committed communist novelists such as Ralph Bates, Rex Warner, Edward Upward and the American Alvah Bessie (Hoskins ch IV; Weintraub 237). In New Zealand, too, the same sense of artistic mission emerges in the pages of progressive publications such as *Tomorrow*, where H. Winston Rhodes declared in 1936 that “art must be purposive if it is to be art” (“The Left Theatre” 13).

By comparison, Texidor’s intent is more ambivalent, more shaded by retrospectivity and the knowledge that the cause to which *Diary*’s characters are wedded would be comprehensively defeated, by forces of the Left as much as the Right. Their words and actions thus have a proleptic quality: even as they speak, their speech is inflected with the inevitable failure of their intentions. There is ambivalence also in the politics of some key characters, especially the central figure Magda. Like Texidor herself, Magda is capable of ideological purity – at one point she declares her intention “to give herself to the revolution” – but she also recoils from the peasant fighter who insists all the bourgeoisie must die, and she is distressed at the anarchists’ destruction of the statue of the Virgin she witnesses in Turissa (Folder 1b). Ultimately, she seems devoted less to an abstract cause than to specific people and places: the two Cruz brothers who become her lovers, other Barcelona anarchists (“the last people in Europe who have a living faith”), the beleaguered residents of Turissa (Folder 1b). By situating her character in a grey zone between the black-and-white polarities of political dogmas, and in privileging human connections over ideologies, Texidor might be accused of a failure of political courage, or of irredeemably bourgeois values. But in fact she is not alone in such political equivocations. Many of the leading writers of the war were, or became, so-called “committed noncombatants”, passionate supporters of the Republican cause but deeply troubled by the violence, betrayals and political manoeuvring apparently required to further it (Weintraub ch 2). As early as 1937, Stephen Spender, for example, announced his disillusionment not only with war but with the cynical exploitation of political ideals by the powerful on both sides. As he wrote that year in *New Statesman and Nation*:

The dead in wars are not heroes: they are freezing or rotting lumps of isolated insanity ... to say those who happen to be killed are heroic is a wicked attempt to identify the dead with the abstract ideas which have brought them to the front, thus adding prestige to those ideas, which are used to lead the living to similar 'heroic' deaths. (quoted in Hoskins 224)

Likewise Magda, shocked at the “grotesque disaster” she (correctly) anticipates when the once-pacifist Martin joins the POUM, rails against the coming war – not only because of the deaths that will ensue but because of the corruption of language required to rationalise and exalt the inevitable slaughter. Watching her husband sleep, satiated by the revolutionary rhetoric he has heard in Barcelona, Magda concludes Martin has “made himself drunk with words ... his smile set in an imbecile satisfaction, oblivious, self important, full of a great duty” (Folder 1a). Later, it is the adequacy of her own words that she calls into question:

She tripped over heather roots that crossed the path, she talked of the horror of war, the beastliness, the waste, the stupidity, but the words cooled into nonsense as they fell, for the night with the risen moon, insultingly calm, supported Martin's innocent composure. It was all on her side, against her. (Folder 1a)

Notwithstanding its periodic passages of political exposition, it seems clear that Texidor did not intend *Diary* as a vehicle for the kind of didactic “parable art” that the young Auden sought in 1930 (in Hoskins 243), or even Rhodes's “purposive” art. Her real interest lies in using her narrative impulses and craft to particularise, humanise and render personal one of the twentieth century's most frequently mythologised and misappropriated conflicts. She does so most effectively when she deliberately disrupts her prose with a change of tone or viewpoint, or allows political rhetoric to segue into banal conversation, or mixes registers and styles to produce the same jarring, unsettling counterpoint heard in the best of her short stories. Thus, Magda's stilted and slightly histrionic description of her failures in battle delivered to the anarchist Francesco – “I tremble when I think of my luck in finding you alive on this balcony. I do not deserve it. I was terrible at the front. I worried Martin. But I did not worry you. Say I did not. Did I trouble you much? Did you hate me?” – is undercut by his unexpectedly laconic response: “I thought a bucket of cold water thrown over you would have been best” (Folder 5). Similarly, Magda's saccharine description of the “angelitos”, two children she cares for in the orphanage and hopes to take home to England, slips into the disconcerting observation that the little boy “is a real anarchist. I am rather afraid of the boy” (Folder 1d).

Perhaps the strongest passages in the entire book are those set at the front, where Magda's experiences are suffused with a dreamlike unreality and detachment. At Almudévar, mules carrying supplies for the fascists pass by her slowly "like the silhouette processions that pass across the backcloth of a theatre". She watches as an armoured car advances down a nearby road – "the strange creature ... blindly nosed its way along the open stretch of road between the quiet trees" – and is blown up. Her response is not predictable horror or distress, but utter disengagement. Even she seems mildly surprised at finding the scene "[i]ntensely interesting to watch but not having any connection with anything" (Folder 7).

Elsewhere, Texidor disrupts the conventions of war writing with satire or a comedic interlude that might have been designed to illustrate Orwell's description of the Civil War as "a comic opera with an occasional death" (*Homage to Catalonia* 34). Berated by an officer for running too slowly under fire, Magda readily admits her failings:

- I can't run fast enough.
- Why did you come then?
- I didn't know. I won the mile race at school. (Folder 7)

Later, waiting to advance on the enemy lines, Magda has an incongruous drawing-room exchange with another officer:

- You are not afraid, mademoiselle?
- Not just at the moment, thank you.
- You speak excellent French.
- Thank you.
- But you are English?
- Yes I lived in Paris. You speak excellent French also.
- I too lived in Paris. It is a wonderful city.
- Truly.
- We can move now. Au revoir, mademoiselle, and good luck.
- Good luck. (Folder 7)

In making such "double-edged and subtle slippage[s]" (Simons 9) between modes and between representations of war (as everyday routine and as surreal nightmare), *Diary* invites

comparison with the work of Rosamond Lehmann and Jean Rhys. Such deliberate eruptions of social comedy into the serious business of war also allow Texidor to aver its absurdity and banality without didacticism. Sargeson, had he been asked to critique the manuscript, might well have advised her to strip it of its expository digressions and earnest polemics, and to trust instead the capabilities she demonstrates in such passages: a deadly instinct for satire and absurdity, a powerful visual imagination and an acute ear for the evasions and dissimulation of formal discourse.

However, it is doubtful that Sargeson ever saw the novel in its more developed form, although he may well have critiqued some of the early material drafted in New Zealand. Perhaps it was at his suggestion that Texidor raided it for short stories such as “Jesús Jiménez”. If so, this suggests Sargeson considered Texidor’s material and talents were more suited to the shorter form, a view Texidor herself periodically expressed. But, like the other developing writers Sargeson mentored in New Zealand, she became fixated on publishing a novel, even once the personal and disturbing nature of her material made it increasingly difficult for her to complete it. Eventually, it seems to have become impossible.²⁵¹ In *Diary*, the doctor who encounters the traumatised Magda after the war sees “something abnormal in her excitement ... [Spain] was all she lived for. She wanted to live it all over again. ... ‘I did wrong’ she used to say over and over” (Folder 5). Standing behind this image of Magda, it is possible to make out Texidor herself, chain-smoking as she types obsessively in the shed Werner built for her in the Blue Mountains, reworking her Spanish experience over and over, confronting questions that had preoccupied, even tormented her, since Spain. As a combatant in a vicious war, had she done something brave and necessary, or regrettable and shameful? She had ‘dirtied her hands’ by fighting; moreover, she had done so on behalf of a cause that had failed Spain and the Spanish people; which was the worse crime? Was she guilty of what Auden’s poem “Spain” calls “the necessary murder” (Spender and Lehmann 58), if not by pulling a trigger herself, then as a complicit apparatchik? Was she “the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled”, as Orwell put it, someone whose commitment to a cause is contingent on their own “sense of personal immunity”? (Orwell,

²⁵¹ Texidor’s protracted struggle to fictionalise her Civil War experiences recalls Vera Brittain’s repeated attempts throughout the 1920s to give fictional expression to the personal grief and political passions unleashed by the First World War. It was only once Brittain turned to memoir, encouraged in part by the success of autobiographical accounts such as Robert Graves’s *Goodbye to All That* (1929), that she found a satisfactory form for her material, culminating in the publication of the enduringly popular *Testament of Youth* (1933) (Bishop 48).

“Inside” 37). And so she writes on and on, unearthing layers of culpability and guilt and horror that, once brought into the light, cannot easily be reinterred.²⁵²

In this sense, Texidor’s unfinished novel exemplifies modernist ‘trauma writing’, a quintessentially modern literary phenomenon catalysed by the singularly brutal and barbarous nature of twentieth-century warfare. In trauma writing, the boundaries between literature and therapy blur, as the writer wrestles with “what it really means for the mind to be possessed by an experience it cannot represent to itself” and to be “inhabited by a lost past” (Stonebridge 200). Like the American poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), Texidor “wrote and wrote again the narrative of life-shattering events” that obsessed and came to define her (Henke 164).²⁵³ Yet with every iteration, she seemed less and less able to reach a satisfactory resolution, either to the narrative itself or to what Freud called the “traumatic neurosis” activated by revisiting a painful past (in Stonebridge 196). What remains is less a finished work of fiction than an increasingly disturbed, and ultimately inconclusive, conversation with herself.

²⁵² Interview with Rosamunda Droesch, 25 April 2015. She describes her mother as increasingly jumpy, tense and preoccupied during this period, clearly affected by what would now be considered classic symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Texidor’s attitude to her war experiences was coloured by overwhelming guilt – guilt at having compromised her humanity by taking up arms for an ultimately doomed cause, rather than guilt at having ‘run away’ before the final defeat (an accusation sometimes levelled at foreigners who fought for the Republic). Texidor was evacuated from Barcelona by the British Navy towards the end of 1938.

²⁵³ H.D.’s multiple personal tragedies during and immediately after World War One provoked severe post-traumatic stress symptoms for which Sigmund Freud prescribed scriptotherapy, or “writing as healing”. According to Suzette Henke, Dr Freud’s treatment worked: H.D. found relief from “the most deleterious effects” of her wartime traumas through writing the autobiographical novels *Bid Me to Live* (1960, written in 1939) and *Asphodel* (1992, written 1921-22) (Henke 164).

CHAPTER 8

A book “one might not unfairly describe as ‘clever’”: *These Dark Glasses*

These Dark Glasses (1949) has been variously called “the product of a sick mind” and Texidor’s “masterpiece” (Wilson, “Despair” 16; Sargeson, *Never* 64). It is at once a controversial roman à clef, an elegy for Europe’s vanished pre-war bohemia and perhaps “the oddest book ever to have been supported by a New Zealand Government” (Sargeson, *Never* 66).

The narrator is a young English communist, Ruth Brown, who arrives in the fictional Riviera resort of Calanques. There she seeks respite from the horrors of the Spanish Civil War, where her friend (and perhaps lover) Victor has been killed.²⁵⁴ In a series of diary-like entries, Ruth records her nine-day stay: she picks up with old friends, acts as a secretary to an aspiring young novelist, visits Marseilles, has a meaningless affair with a local hairdresser and contemplates suicide. The novel ends with the enigmatic image of a boat disappearing into the hazy horizon, leaving the reader uncertain if Ruth has in fact taken her life.

The story strongly invites autobiographical readings. In August 1938, Texidor had holidayed in Cassis on the Riviera after she had fought in Spain where, like Ruth, she had also written propaganda for the Republican cause. In Cassis, as her protagonist does in Calanques, Texidor became immersed in a demi-monde of self-absorbed artists, bohemian drifters and lost souls. These included several long-time friends and associates from London, some of whom she depicts in the novella. The painter Mark Gertler becomes the neurotic artist Julian; his wife Marjorie figures as the put-upon and snobbish Jane; Kate Foster appears (“brown and business-like in dark glasses”) along with her lover Jan Kurzke whom Texidor recasts as the radical political refugee Otto, “a dream of an Aryan” (*Fifteen Minutes* 56); the painter and

²⁵⁴ Most reviews of the novel describe Victor as Ruth’s lover. However, writing to John Reece Cole from Australia, Texidor was adamant that Ruth “[t]hough at present rather dishevelled is not the sort of girl to have ‘lovers’”. Of the reviewers’ apparent belief that Ruth has left behind a string of lovers in Spain, she comments: “apart from its unlikelihood (not many of the English succumbed physically) [the reviewers’ assumption] makes her behaviour unintelligible to me”. Texidor to Cole, 25 October [1949?]. Cole Papers, MS-Papers-4648-17. ATL.

art writer Richard Carline becomes the doctrinaire Howard. Werner clearly considered the work strongly autobiographical, and not only because of the real people it referenced. He later called it a “very melancholy novel” that depicted Greville’s state of mind after “the Spanish debacle” (quoted in Smithyman, introduction 14).

Tellingly, though, Sargeson – to whom Texidor revealed much about her pre-war life in Europe – did not seem to regard the novella’s possible autobiographical correspondences as its primary source of interest. His jacket blurb praises *These Dark Glasses* as “a powerful moral fable” for its times. Elsewhere, he calls it “a comedy with tragic undertones, a memorable illumination of one small corner of the vast European psychosis before the large-scale catastrophe which closed the thirties” (*Never* 65). And he insists that, despite its wholly European frame of reference, the novella both sprang from and left its mark on the local scene: the novel and its author made a significant impression in New Zealand, he says, “especially with women readers and writers” (*Never* 65). His verdict rather flies in the face of the evidence – the novel’s print run was around 300, and Texidor reported with disappointment that “the few people ... who read [it] returned it in absolute silence”.²⁵⁵ Whether or not the novel had quite the impact on readers that Sargeson claims, he clearly considered its merits had little to do with its status as confessional autobiography.

Smithyman, too, believes Ruth Brown should not be read as a simple cipher for Texidor, despite the undoubted biographical parallels (introduction 14). Most obviously, their politics differ – although, arguably, disillusioned communists and anarchists had much in common after their shared betrayal by the larger forces at play in the Spanish Civil War. More importantly, Smithyman notes Texidor’s consciously ironic detachment from Ruth: “Whatever Ruth owes to Greville’s experience, she is not so much a projection as a target. Greville is not sorry for Ruth” (introduction 16).

²⁵⁵ Texidor to Sargeson, July [1949?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-182. ATL. Texidor was writing from Australia, where she claimed the only favourable comment she had received was from the novelist Kylie Tennant – “who is such a good sort and couldn’t hurt a fly, let alone a failing fellow follower of the muse”. It is possible Sargeson was aware of more enthusiastic responses from New Zealand readers. As to the print run, although he told Cole in 1949 that Caxton was printing “50 case-bound copies and 250 fold over” (Cole, “Letters” 261), he later advised Texidor that “all 159” copies had been sold. Sargeson to Texidor, undated [1949?]. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1, Folder 2. UA.

8.1 The product of a sick mind: the critical reception in New Zealand

The novel's appearance in 1949 was the culmination of years of frustrating setbacks. Texidor had completed it at least five years earlier, and sent it to John Lehmann. His response to Texidor does not survive. But the London literary agent Laurence Pollinger advised Sargeson that while Lehmann had read the manuscript "with great interest and admired it in many ways", it was "too short for publication under present conditions"; in wartime, it was simply uneconomical for The Hogarth Press to publish a book of only 100 pages.²⁵⁶ Marcia Allentuck presents a different picture in her account of the genesis of *These Dark Glasses*. She cites a draft of the rejection letter Lehmann sent Texidor, in which he praises the novel as "full of feeling and subtle observation" and notes how well she has captured "the atmosphere of that particular moment in history". However, he writes:

I do not feel it is altogether a success, partly, I think, because the current of bitterness which controls the style is too strong and too unvarying. I feel it would be much more alive artistically if it had more emotional relief. (229)

Texidor thanked Lehmann for his helpful criticism – in New Zealand, she observed, "we all admire each other so extravagantly that we are in danger of stifling in a fog of appreciation" (Allentuck 229) – but reported that the novel had since been accepted for publication in Australia. The publisher in question was Reed and Harris, soon to fall victim to the Ern Malley hoax and subsequent legal action against *Angry Penguins*, the provocative literary magazine the firm also published. When Reed and Harris collapsed, *These Dark Glasses* was stranded. At Sargeson's instigation, the Caxton Press took it over, with a grant from the recently-established New Zealand Literary Fund (secured by Sargeson) covering production costs.²⁵⁷ Texidor having by now left New Zealand for Australia, Sargeson took responsibility for checking the proofs and seeing the book – which Werner called Texidor's "abandoned baby"²⁵⁸ – into print.

²⁵⁶ Pollinger to Sargeson, 10 January 1945. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-102. ATL.

²⁵⁷ Sargeson's handwritten note on a letter he received from Werner Droescher in February 1949 indicates the Literary Fund's support comprised a 50 pound loan (to be repaid from book sales) and a 50 pound grant. W. Droescher to Sargeson, 7 February 1949. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-182. ATL.

²⁵⁸ W. Droescher to Sargeson, undated [1949?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-182. ATL.

The novella's difficulties did not end there. When copies reached England, Mark Gertler's widow, Marjorie, was distraught at Texidor's thinly-veiled characterisations.²⁵⁹ She and other long-standing friends reportedly "rejected [Texidor] strongly" (Allentuck 230). Years later, Texidor's sister Kate told Sargeson she too was "mildly annoyed" that Texidor had named one of the characters Kate, "as that summer, 1938, Jan and I were never in Cassis but [visited] for one day from another resort, and after G[reville] had left".²⁶⁰ According to Kate, Marjorie "rounded up all the copies ... and destroyed them. ... Thus the book was wiped from the face of London. The people referred to in *These Dark Glasses* were happy to assist in its elimination because they did not like the sharp and 'nasty' references in the book to personal details".²⁶¹ Maurice Duggan recalled Texidor "sending out a sort of letter of justification to all the people who might be hurt by the Glasses book",²⁶² and it seems that the rift was eventually mended or at least papered over: Marjorie Gertler (or Kostenz, as she became) remained close to Texidor's daughters until her death.

In New Zealand, meanwhile, *These Dark Glasses* met with responses ranging from bafflement to distaste to outright hostility. Many local reviewers seemed disconcerted by the "current of bitterness" Lehmann had noted. Writing in the *Arts Year Book* for 1950, Patrick Macaskill opined that any work of art "however morbid its subject matter" should offer readers some glimmer of hope and inspiration: he found "nothing redeeming in this novel except its form, which is a considerable intellectual achievement" (148). Helen Shaw praised its "terse, metallic, image-weighted writing" and "descriptive colour" in *Here & Now*, but considered it an impression rather than a novel (32). For the *New Zealand Listener*, Phillip Wilson called it "the product of a sick mind" but was forced to admire the skill and sophistication of the writing. Texidor's pessimistic world view, preoccupation with "free love and sexual abnormality" and technical accomplishment all seem to have come as something of a surprise to Wilson, even though he had probably met her through their shared mentor, Sargeson: "One or two short stories with a local background had revealed a considerable ability, but they had not prepared us for anything quite like this" ("Despair" 16).

²⁵⁹ See also chapter 2.

²⁶⁰ Kurzke to Sargeson, undated [1976?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-4261-097. ATL.

²⁶¹ R. Droescher to F. Barrowman, 7 July 1987. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 12. SLNSW.

²⁶² Duggan to Sargeson, 19 October 1950. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-4261-044. ATL.

Landfall ran a three-page review of *These Dark Glasses*, immediately following James K. Baxter's similarly substantial review of *Man Alone*. The author was J. C. Reid, lecturer (later professor) in the University of Auckland's English Department and a prominent Catholic layman whose conservative religious convictions were well known. From Texidor's perspective, Reid's values and literary tastes made him an unfortunate choice as reviewer. Few in Sargeson's circle regarded him as a supporter of New Zealand literature, even though he would later help introduce it to the university curriculum. He had recently accused Sargeson of a "predilection for the sordid" and an all-consuming "cynicism from which health is absent" (*Creative Writing* 61). In Sargeson's correspondence with Texidor and others, Reid usually figures as a butt of malice and mockery: "stinker" was one of Sargeson's kinder epithets (quoted in Shieff, *Letters* 129).

Reid takes a determinedly relativised view of *These Dark Glasses*. He benchmarks it against a dizzying array of interwar Anglo-American writers and movements: Cyril Connolly, Evelyn Waugh, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, John O'Hara, Albert Camus, Bloomsbury and Sartrean existentialism among them. Texidor apparently draws heavily on what Reid curiously terms "the Stein-Hemingway tradition" – an odd coupling, considering the two American writers' manifest stylistic dissimilarities ("Review" 377).²⁶³ Texidor convincingly apes this outmoded high-modernist tradition, Reid argues, but lacks the talent to deliver more than "an unsuccessful attempt at cleverness" – notwithstanding the occasional illuminating image, an admitted "consistency of atmosphere" and some well-wrought dialogue (377, 378). Much of Reid's review is devoted to Texidor's prose style (and "a book like this is almost wholly a creature of style", 377), which he finds variously strained, banal or merely monotonous. He considers the novella curiously anachronistic; its wearied existentialist tone, freighted with post-war disillusion, seems ill-matched to the pre-war period and 'types' it depicts (I shall return to this charge of anachronism later). But Reid's real complaint with *These Dark Glasses*, stirred perhaps by Sargeson claiming it as a "moral fable", concerns its

²⁶³ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine these writers' differences, or similarities, in depth. Certainly, Stein – whose Paris salon Hemingway frequented in the interwar period – influenced aspects of Hemingway's style, notably her technique of "insistent repetition". However, Hemingway's aim was always truth-telling, by means of a controlled, flinty vernacular idiom that held back a groundswell of lyricism and feeling. By contrast, Stein arguably sought aestheticism for its own sake, remaking and redeploying language through a strategy of "relentless circularity" and using words to "conjure material realities unconnected to their usual referents" (Davison 61). Texidor herself found J. C. Reid's term meaningless and faintly absurd. She wrote to *Landfall* with heavy sarcasm in 1950: "My book is in the Stein-Hemingway tradition. Why not? *Three Lives* [Stein's first published work, noted for its highly-stylised prose] does bear a striking resemblance to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*" ("Letter" 177).

moral position. Texidor's fascination with the shabby and aimless lives of a pre-war European bohemian milieu – and especially her refusal to censure their hedonism, sexual appetites and casual cruelties – amounts to a moral failing that outstrips even her stylistic failings, in Reid's view. Not only is her material "well-worn and relatively trivial" but her treatment of it lacks "the healthy anger of a satirist who finds lives meaningless because he knows they should have a meaning or the urbane judgment of one whose own vision of life rests on positive values" (378). *These Dark Glasses* is the kind of fiction "one might not unfairly describe as 'clever'", Reid alleges (378). His remarks imply authorial pretension on Texidor's part, but also demonstrate his own hierarchy of literary value: a fiction of moral purpose (the transmission of "positive values" and attitudes) is preferred to this wearied cynicism.

However, Reid compares *These Dark Glasses* more favourably with other New Zealand fiction. In this context, paradoxically, he considers the novel both original and socially useful:

It is interesting to find a piece of fiction written in New Zealand which deals convincingly with a foreign setting, which is not concerned with the fantasy-world of a child, 'dumb oxen', adolescent sex repressions, life on a backblocks farm or men who drop cats into hot stoves, and which at the same time has a local application, for this country has its Calanques, too. (378)

Again, Reid indicates his preference for fiction of social utility and moral improvement (as a scholar, his specialty was Victorian literature). Yet he is also, perhaps unconsciously, gesturing back towards the literary nationalism of the 1930s, which not only accorded literature a social purpose but also tended to equate local relevance with literary value. If *These Dark Glasses* has any value (and its "foreign setting" all but debars this possibility), Reid believes it is only by virtue of its "local application".²⁶⁴

Reid's concession that *These Dark Glasses* may tell New Zealanders something useful about themselves is unexpected, given its pervasive atmosphere of promiscuity and decadence. Reid had earlier condemned such qualities as both distasteful and distinctly anti-national when he detected their presence in Sargeson's "narrow world of perverts" (quoted in M. King 272). Although published a decade earlier, Sargeson's "Sale Day", in which Victor memorably drops a randy tomcat into the stove, clearly still rankles with Reid: this act of

²⁶⁴ The indigenous Calanques Reid refers to is presumably the North Shore literary scene, over which Sargeson held dominion.

sado-sexual attention-seeking exemplifies the unwholesome impulses Reid considers have no place in the national literature. Why, then, does Texidor's novel – in which married Englishwomen have “rather Lawrencian” sex with fishermen behind rocks, and clever and amusing “fairies” dance together in the cafés (*Fifteen Minutes* 28, 39) – not earn his censure too? The answer, perhaps, is that Texidor's marginal claim on New Zealandness exempts her from the standards by which Reid judges Sargeson. Certainly, her novel fails in Reid's eyes, but it fails on grounds other than its ill-suitedness to the project of moral regeneration he wants local writers to embrace. Although she has demonstrated a careful attention to the New Zealand scene elsewhere in her fiction, and even though this novel's publication has been bankrolled by the state, Reid reads it as something apart, an exotic emanation from an outworn world whose literature necessarily shares its malaise and moral failures. *These Dark Glasses* – its time, place and tone pitched as far from the local post-war scene as can be imagined – confirms Texidor's exclusion from the New Zealand canon. And her refusal to pass moral judgment on her characters also situates *These Dark Glasses* right at the heart of mid-century modernist (or intermodernist) practice, as I discuss further below.

Landfall later printed Texidor's spirited riposte to Reid's “book-eating” review. If her novel is indeed the kind that might not unfairly be described as clever, she wishes it had warranted a review of the kind “that might not unfairly be described as criticism” (“Letter” 177; all quotes in this paragraph are from this source). She accuses Reid of using a disproportionately large sledgehammer to demolish what is no more than “a small light-weight novel”, and professes astonishment at the modernist literary pantheon deployed to demonstrate its inadequacies: “everyone is here but James Joyce who is probably being held in reserve for a National Emergency like Sargeson”. Reid deliberately rolls out the big names only to damn *These Dark Glasses* by comparison, she claims: “It is Sartrean [sic] Existentialism without Sartre, Hemingway without passion, Connolly without malice ... clever but only in inverted commas. Does this mean not clever?” And Texidor detects a tell-tale colonial cringe in Reid's claim for the novel's relevance to New Zealanders: he admits *These Dark Glasses* has local application, yet is also adamant that “its significance in our world is nil”. In other words, even fiction fit for a local audience is unlikely to be good enough for anyone else. Texidor, by this time living in Australia, seems all too keenly aware of the predicament

facing the writer working in New Zealand, at the mercy of the double standards of critics who demand the local but deny it any wider value.²⁶⁵

8.2 Expanding modernisms

I have examined the critical reception of *These Dark Glasses* in some detail because the questions of literary classification, periodisation and geography raised especially by Reid – where, to what era and to whom does this book belong? – invite us to consider it in the broader context of literary modernism. Since the late 1990s, the emergence of ‘new modernist studies’ (propelled especially by the energetic Modernist Studies Association) has seen the re-formulation of long-entrenched understandings about what constitutes modernist writing, where and when it emerged, who wrote and read it, and its relationship to the social, economic, political, historical and technological contexts in which it was produced. Once immutable scholarly truths – that modernist literature emerged at a particular historical moment (the decades immediately before and after World War One) and in certain locations (England, America, the capitals of continental Europe), that it was produced by a particular cohort of mandarin writers (Anglo-American, largely male, often exiles) with defined stylistic and formal obsessions (especially with interiority, ‘difficulty’ and the need to “make it new”²⁶⁶) – have come to seem insufficient.

Modernism is now understood as something messier, less rarefied, more elastic and more transnational than the “grand unified accounts” proposed by the New Critics, Hugh Kenner or Edmund Wilson, for example (Brooker et al., *Oxford Handbook* 4; Davison 103–109). Influenced first by scholars such as Harold Bloom, Malcolm Bradbury and J. Hillis Miller – then by structuralist, post-structuralist, post-colonial and feminist criticism, and most recently by the New Modernist Studies movement – modernism has been reimagined. Increasingly, it

²⁶⁵ Sargeson thoroughly approved of Texidor’s letter to *Landfall*, praising her for “tick[ing] off that Reid swine very nicely... The letter couldn’t have been better – not a wrong or superfluous word, and every point so beautifully turned.” He also took the opportunity to encourage Texidor, by now living and working in a crowded Australian refugee camp, to return to her typewriter, adding: “Clever woman – see what you can do when you try. I mean with that particular kind of writing” (Sargeson to Texidor, 18 July 1950. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1, Folder 2. UA).

²⁶⁶ The popular catchphrase of the modernist movement is generally associated with Ezra Pound’s *Make It New: Essays by Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, September 1934). Pound’s phrase was, in fact, a recycled fragment from an ancient Chinese text (North).

is framed as a set of artistic practices that do not necessarily seek to break with past traditions but rather to rework, translate or take issue with them. Modernism is seen as the outcome of “complex intellectual and economic transactions” across the globe (Mao and Walkowitz 738) as much as something produced by clever young aesthetes in Parisian garrets. Its temporal boundaries have been extended, sometimes reaching back into the eighteenth century and forward towards the end of the twentieth or even further. The traditional modernist map has been redrawn to reveal the richness at its margins. Latin America has been proposed as modernism’s true birthplace, and its development traced across numerous imperial outposts where modernist strategies have been employed to subvert, destabilise and transform the dominant culture (Brooker et al., *Oxford Handbook* 12). The modernist credentials of writers previously dismissed as irredeemably mainstream, mediocre or middlebrow have been rediscovered and asserted anew. ‘Modernism’ has been pluralised and, perhaps fittingly, fragmented. Quite apart from the varieties of disciplinary modernisms (architectural, musical, cinematic and more), scholars now acknowledge high, late, romantic, paleo- and proto-modernisms; indigenous, Nordic, Welsh, African and antipodean modernisms; geomodernism, feminist modernism, queer modernism, anti-modernism. In some accounts, post-modernism – with its playful experimentalism, its unabashed raids on other art-forms and traditions, its forays into magic realism, parody and “self-exhausting fictionality” – is seen not as modernism’s successor but as its further iteration, less a rejection than an enlargement of “the abundance of versions of Modernism” (Bradbury and McFarlane 34–35).

The expansionist impulse of recent scholarship has valuably focused attention on neglected texts, authors and preoccupations. Yet it has also unhelpfully swathed ‘modernism’ in an all-encompassing nebulosity. As Kristin Bluemel argues, the word has become a blanket label for a miscellany of texts produced nearly everywhere throughout the twentieth century, and in response to a broad range of social, political, economic and psychological conditions. In the process, what is distinctive and particular about given texts, writers and their environments has become blurred. It is to partly mitigate this loss of specificity and diversity that Bluemel proposes a new critical category: intermodernism.²⁶⁷ Both “a complex theoretical enterprise” (2) and a body of writing with common temporal, stylistic and ideological characteristics,

²⁶⁷ Although the field of intermodernist scholarship has close affinities with middlebrow studies, its advocates consider the “ideologically-charged” term “middlebrow” to be problematic. Elizabeth Maslen, for example, considers any reference to “brows” – high, low or middle – not only smacks of a literary “league table”, but is also an unpleasant reminder of nineteenth-century phrenological theory and associated debates about “the relative intellectual capacities of different races” (21).

intermodernism is a way of accounting for the writers, texts and cultural developments that tend to “disappear in discussions of modernism or postmodernism” (6) – among them realism, nationalism, regional literatures, children’s literature, women’s literature, journalism and more. Importantly, Bluemel conceives of intermodernism not as modernism’s binary opposite but as something intrinsically entangled with it, “a cultural and critical bridge or borderland whose inhabitants are always looking two ways” (2). *These Dark Glasses*’s claim to be considered an intermodernist work is examined in 8.4 below.

Other ways of particularising and discriminating between the diverse artefacts and attitudes now likely to be labelled modernist have also emerged. The discipline of middlebrow studies, for example, has focused particularly on the work of mid-century women writers. Their characteristic concerns (class, gender identity, bohemian or dysfunctional family life), favoured genres (including the country house novel, the family saga and detective fiction), stylistic tendencies (conventional rather than avant-garde, vernacular rather than mandarin) and their undeniable popularity have rendered them largely invisible in the eyes of modernist scholars, until recently. Their exclusion is, argues Nicola Humble, “one of the reasons that ... our understanding of modernism is so limited” (15).²⁶⁸ Also with an eye to deepening (rather than simply broadening) that understanding, Rebecca L. Walkowitz has drawn attention to the specifics of “critical cosmopolitanism” evident within the broad field of international modernism. In *Cosmopolitan Style* (2006), she examines the work of selected exiles, flâneurs and migrants, eliding distinctions between the modern and the postmodern by considering writers as geographically and temporally diverse as Joseph Conrad and Kazuo Ishiguro, James Joyce and Salman Rushdie. All have acquired the inflections of multiple languages and literary traditions as they have moved between locations. But what makes their work truly cosmopolitan, she argues, is not simply its mobility or magpie tendencies but its self-reflectiveness, its resistance to and contentious engagement with the multiple places, traditions, languages and institutions it draws on. Eliot’s *Waste Land* may be assembled from a “collage of national influences” (7), but that does not make him a cosmopolitan writer like W.G. Sebald, for example. According to Walkowitz, Sebald not only mines other traditions but also “unsettles the differences among them. ... [He] enhances and also disables local

²⁶⁸ Pressy, the insufferable young novelist whose manuscript Ruth types in *These Dark Glasses*, epitomises the dilemma of the author torn between literariness and middlebrow populism. While knowing the public will “of course miss the point” of his aesthetically sophisticated novel, he secretly yearns for it to be a best-seller – primarily so “he and his friends would have the thrill of exhibiting themselves to the public that missed the point” (45-46).

points of view: enhances, because he shows the global networks in which even the most local experiences participate, and disables, because he suggests that those networks change what local experiences are” (2). Walkowitz’s concept of critical cosmopolitanism is yet another example of the temporal, spatial and even vertical²⁶⁹ enlargement that characterises new understandings of modernism.

More than six decades after its publication, *These Dark Glasses* (and indeed Texidor’s fiction as a whole) can be situated at the very centre of this energetic contemporary critical discussion about the boundaries and categories of literary modernism. Her work exemplifies, and is illuminated by, many of its central themes. The novel does not fall within modernism’s traditional period-based parameters, yet it is demonstrably engaged with the high modernist tradition and with the experience of modernity, in all its freedom and horror. It reveals a high-modernist interest in aesthetic experimentation, obliqueness and interiority, but also a commitment to using prose as what Sartre called “a medium of communication, of action, of history” (“What is Literature”, 1947, quoted in Fletcher and Bradbury 413).²⁷⁰ Like Jean Rhys, Texidor’s life and work roam between metropolitan centre and colonial periphery with a mobility that complicates conventional understandings of the era’s intellectual and creative traffic, the direction of its flow and the nature of its collisions. As in Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), *These Dark Glasses* offers a view of the metropolis written from the colonial margins, and mediated by the knowing gaze of the border-crossing cosmopolitan. With its abundant high-culture references and modernist tropes, the novel seems to demand serious reading by an elite audience, yet Texidor herself characterised it as “lightweight”, seemingly willing for it to be shelved alongside the middlebrow literature of “the back bedroom” (MacKay and Stonebridge 1). So where does it belong?

²⁶⁹ In which formerly sharp distinctions between ‘high’ and ‘low’ works, genres and art-forms have been questioned and reframed (Mao and Walkowitz 738)

²⁷⁰ Modernist scholars struggle to categorise Sartre. John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury position his novels – with their overt political and philosophical convictions, and “obvious referential and realistic bias” (413) – within the reaction against modernist experimentalism and the return to social realism that characterised fiction of the 1930s and ’40s, especially in France. However, they also acknowledge that both Sartre’s *La Nausée* (1949) and Camus’s *L’Etranger* (1942) demonstrate the modernist “formal intricacy” and “curiosity” present in many French novels of the period (413–14). Sartre’s fiction is perhaps thus a prime example of Bluemel’s intermodernism, with its tendency to “loo[k] two ways”.

8.3 A modernist novel?

High modernists are prominent in J.C. Reid's list of influences from which Texidor has purportedly assembled a style "not exactly her own" – Stein, Hemingway, Wyndham Lewis, Bloomsbury ("Review" 377–78). Other reviewers have drawn comparisons between *These Dark Glasses* and the work of modernists not quite so 'high' – Mansfield and Rhys (Modjeska and others), Anna Kavan (Beyer), Jane Bowles (Farmer).

Reid suggests that Texidor's prime model was Cyril Connolly's 1936 novel *The Rock Pool*, in which a young Englishman of literary aspirations records the dissolute bohemian life of a Riviera resort. Smithyman agrees Texidor almost certainly would have read Connolly's novel either in Europe at the time of its publication, after she came to New Zealand (Sargeson owned a copy which she may have borrowed), or in 1947, when it was republished with a revealing new author's note. The most obvious likenesses are in setting and characters. Texidor's Calanques – with its unforgiving sunshine and glittering sea, shuttered pensions, intrigues and minor tragedies playing out in the "mercilessly lighted cabaret of the beach" (*Fifteen Minutes* 29) – undeniably recalls Connolly's Trou-sur-Mer.²⁷¹ Similarly, her sunglass-wearing, anis-drinking, apaché-dancing bohemians might well have migrated from Connolly's resort, also teeming with lost souls, sexual predators, White Russians and delusional artists.²⁷² But such settings and characters are not Connolly's exclusive property. Texidor's characters might also have stumbled into Calanques from Hemingway's Boulevard Montparnasse or the terrace cafés of Bayonne (*The Sun Also Rises*, 1927), from the Left Bank bars frequented by Jean Rhys's fragile Sasha Jensen (*Good Morning, Midnight*, 1939), or even from Linda Radlett's Paris in Nancy Mitford's later *The Pursuit of Love* (1945). Texidor has imbued her Calanques with particularity and concrete detail, but she is also deliberately trading in recognisable types and settings, the common currency of pre-war literary modernism. Certainly, Smithyman considers the similarities between *These Dark Glasses* and *The Rock Pool* incidental and unremarkable, indicative less of conscious imitation than of

²⁷¹ Trou-sur-Mer is said to be based on Cagnes-sur-Mer, situated well north of Cassis between Cannes and Nice.

²⁷² Texidor uses dark glasses as a metaphor for her characters' solipsism and wilful indifference to the outside world. Dark glasses allow them to retreat from its unpleasant demands, while also distorting their view of it. "It's funny, one can't hear well in these dark glasses," comments Kate as she sunbathes with Otto on the beach (62). Dale Benson attributes Texidor's title to Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* (Benson 187), and there are also echoes of St Paul's comment on the imperfections of human understanding ("For now we see through a glass, darkly", 1 Corinthians 13).

Texidor's wish to put her own stamp on material already likely to be familiar to her readers (introduction 13–14).

Beyond the familiarity of its setting and characters, the formal and stylistic qualities of *These Dark Glasses* also set it firmly in the modernist tradition. It deploys several of the definitive modernist attributes identified by Marjorie Perloff, for example, including “the replacement of representation of the external world by the imaginative construction of the [writer’s] inner world”, “verbal ambiguity and complexity”, “the fluidity of consciousness”, “the increasing importance attached to the Freudian unconscious and to the dream work” and “the malaise of the individual in the ‘lonely crowd’” (quoted in Davison 4). Similarly, many hallmarks of high modernist fiction defined by John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury are conspicuously present – a concern with “the fictive structure itself” and with “the means and modes of art” (396); a determination to illuminate “the world beyond the contingent detail and haphazard reality” through symbol and myth (401); a fluid and impressionistic narrative style that strives to capture “effects” and “the flow of a sensitive human mind” more than materialities (400, 408); an ever-present irony deriving from an acute awareness of “the ephemerality and discontinuity of modern reality” (407, 411).

Such stylistic checklists can be readily applied to *These Dark Glasses*. Ruth’s nine days in Calanques unfolds in fragments, flashes and ephemeral glimpses, the prose alternating between stillness and motion with all the fluidity of Julian’s kaleidoscope (surely the archetypal modernist plaything). Sometimes the narrative pace is as unsettled and febrile as the ever-present mistral that “sickle[s] the shallows” (45) or as turbulent as the “childish and destructive” jazz that plays in the outdoor nightclub above the bay (31). Elsewhere, the prose becomes dreamily becalmed, as when Ruth nearly drowns in the “dense folds” of the warm, heavy sea (35). Such fluctuations in pace and mood are matched by equally abrupt shifts in chronology, in place and voice, between interior and exterior perspectives. Here is Ruth arriving at a café, where she reluctantly joins her friends’ table:

My usual place. I have found a place on the edge of the lighted circle.
Kate has made them move up a little for me. Poor Ruth! Losing poor
Victor like that. And the way she throws herself into that party work. I
know it does make a person rather dreary. ... My friends, my good
friends. (68; ellipsis in original)

A roving microphone seems to be controlling this fragment of narrative, enabling us to eavesdrop on whichever speakers are in range, retrieving slivers of conversation both spoken

and internalised. In the course of a few lines, we hear Ruth's polite voice acknowledging her outsider status to herself and to the world. We hear Kate's, a note of calculated malice always audible beneath the sympathetic surface; finally Ruth's inner voice, with its heavily ironic register, returns.

Such snatches and shards, jolts and juxtapositions give the novel a characteristically modernist disjointedness. The loose diary structure adds to its narrative instability. Crucially, this structure allows Texidor to largely dispense with the tonal indicators, authorial explication and forward momentum necessary in what Virginia Woolf called the "appalling business" of narrative realism. Preoccupied with "getting on from lunch to dinner", realist fiction was, in Woolf's view, fundamentally "false, unreal, merely conventional" (quoted in Davison 44). *These Dark Glasses* shows the same disdain for realism's quotidian restrictions, unfolding instead as a sequence of apparently contingent encounters and episodes, the characters drifting without purpose or plan from beach to nightclub to one another's beds. Some – like the silly Moira, in the throes of a pathetic relationship with a local fisherman, or the Italian boatmen with their beguiling "touch of *Anarchismo*" (71), or the ruined American drunk, dead on the beach in the midday sun like the murdered Arab in Camus's *L'Etranger* – flicker only briefly into view before disappearing from sight. They are bright embers blowing past us: Texidor has no interest in their development or reality beyond those moments, and certainly not in recounting their dull progress "from lunch to dinner".

There is ample evidence of other modernist tropes at work. Irony – embraced by modernist writers as both "a necessary defence" against the powerful and disruptive forces of modern existence, and evidence of their own modernity (Nicholls 5) – is another of the novel's signatures. Ruth's voice announces itself as deeply, self-protectingly ironic when, at the novel's outset, she recalls "those dead days before we were socially conscious" (25). This ironic sensibility is sustained right to the end when, preparing to walk to the place she has chosen for her suicide, she wonders if perhaps this is "an occasion for hard-boiled eggs and bananas" (82). In fact, the very premise of Ruth's sojourn in Calanques – a holiday before she takes her life, a hedonistic interlude book-ended by Victor's death and her own – is itself an absurd irony. Also typically modernist is Texidor's use of symbol, dream and myth to suggest the latent desires, fears and truths that lie beyond the characters' rational apprehension. There are allusions to the Sisyphus myth (see chapter 9) and to Freud; according to Kate, the source of Julian's neuroses is his desire "to get back to the womb" (57). Ruth regularly dreams of

slipping or falling into oblivion, and characters routinely subject their dreams to public scrutiny. The strange sea plant Ruth keeps after a fishing trip, a “pale fleshy thing with a blind face” (71), remains an enigmatic symbol (of fate, death, or cosmic indifference?), finally dying on the day her diary ends. But while clearly interested in the power of the symbol, Texidor also asserts the importance of the material world and “that which stands against the symbol: contingency, reality, history” (Fletcher and Bradbury 406). Her use of symbolism is intermittent and somewhat cautious, as if she is unwilling to alienate readers with too much aestheticism. Perhaps also Texidor was mindful of Sargeson’s likely response. His suspicion of her forays into surrealism and symbolism in “Anyone Home?” has already been noted in chapter 5; he maintained a belief in the writer’s fundamentally democratic obligation to offer a “re-arrangement of reality which is accessible to everyone” (letter to Cole, 1 April 1955, in Shieff 199).

And of course Ruth herself is an exemplary modernist subject, emotionally and psychologically scarred by all the horrors modernity has unleashed – war, death, the loss of love, betrayal, alienation from home and community. She exemplifies Perloff’s isolated consciousness in an indifferent crowd, standing by silently as the party rages on around her, outwardly functioning but inwardly suffering, “invaded by a malaise that is like the toothache before it has settled into its proper tooth” (53). Moreover, like Julian, she too is an artist of sorts, struggling to transfigure her wartime experiences by writing them down in a form more truthful than propaganda: “I have used other people’s words so long. But the real words are near. Set a word to catch a word” (67). In true modernist fashion, she is acutely conscious of the artistic process she is engaged in. “Why are they in my story?”, she puzzles of the characters who appear unannounced on the page, displacing the elusive words she senses waiting “to unfold like a Japanese waterflower” (67). Elsewhere, she hears the familiar political slogans as “[c]annibal words that eat their own meaning”, poor substitutes for “the real words and the sound of thoughts” that she and Victor thought they would find in Spain (29). Ultimately, the act of writing fails her, mere words proving insufficient to express or transform “the debris of [her] Spanish dream” (29).²⁷³ In Ruth’s failure to write honestly about Spain, and in Texidor’s scorn for the political apathy of Calanques’s artistic and intellectual milieu, we recognise the dilemma of those 1930s modernists who tried to establish what has been called “a political aesthetic” (Bluemel 12). Born to the privileged

²⁷³ Ironically, this artistic failure is, briefly, life-giving: it is only her protracted efforts to write about Spain that delay Ruth’s suicide.

“tower of middle-class birth and expensive education” (as Virginia Woolf observed in 1940) but writing at a time when their figurative towers were being torn down by profound social and political change, by revolution and the threat of war (“The Leaning Tower” 170–71), the modernists of the 1930s were, like Ruth, struggling to imbue their art with political utility and to make it matter.

Texidor puts the predicament of the politically-engaged artist to satiric use too. Calanques’s artistic community is awash with self-conscious political awareness and literariness: Julian and Jane’s house is strewn with Left Book Club books and the *New Statesman*, the novelist Pressy to whom Ruth acts as secretary ostentatiously uses his Community Party membership card to bookmark his copy of Chekhov, and Jane professes enthusiasm for the “boy scout atmosphere” (44) of Auden’s poetry. But Ruth understands their politics and artistic endeavours are merely fashionable postures, devoid of integrity and conviction. To Jane, the war in Spain is essentially an inconvenient impediment that has stopped “people like us” from holidaying there (26). When Otto narrates his life as a political dissident, his tale ends with his lover’s disappearance into the darkness of Stalin’s Russia. His sympathetic listeners are both shocked and enthralled, but Ruth recognises that after multiple retellings, Otto is “now more fond of his story” than his presumably liquidated lover (63). Truth has become less important than art. When Julian reports he has donated a painting to “some committee” supporting the Spanish left, she speculates “how risky” it must have been for him to throw his own art “into the welter of world affairs” (80). Fortunately for Julian, Picasso did it first: what looks like an authentic political act is revealed as merely the reproduction of a gesture, for calculated effect.

Against the yardsticks established by traditional scholarship, then, *These Dark Glasses* indeed has modernist credentials, drawing on both the material and the stylistic vocabulary of modernist fiction of the 1920s and ’30s. To J.C. Reid, this is a source of weakness. He charges Texidor with using outmoded techniques in an attempt to reanimate Connolly’s vanished world, to shine a light on “types” who have become “tremendously unimportant” to post-war readers (“Review” 378). Worse, she has falsified her source material, overlaying it with an anachronistic post-war sensibility, a wash of weary existential angst and nihilism that robs her novel of any redeeming moral value. Unlike Connolly, Texidor has thereby mismatched mood with period: even as a period piece, the novella fails. But in fact the world of Connolly’s Trou-sur-Mer is similarly saturated in disillusion and despair, as indeed are

many depictions of (and by) the ‘Lost Generation’ of the 1920s. The sufferings Hemingway projects onto Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, for example, predate the existentialism of the late 1930s and early ’40s. Yet they arise from the same conditions: participation in a war, an over-familiarity with death, the loss of illusions. Reid’s complaint of anachronism seems to be predicated on the false assumption that such despair did not exist before Sartre and Camus (and Texidor) discovered it and named it ‘existentialism’.

Moreover, Reid does not seem to consider that, in *These Dark Glasses*, datedness is part of the point: the novella is *about* retrospection. The failure of the protagonists’ articles of faith – in art, in revolution, in personal freedom – is determined even as they articulate them, their dreams and delusions already shrivelling before the fierce winds of history we know will soon engulf them.

8.4 An intermodernist novel?

Reid’s determinedly periodising instinct invites us to consider *These Dark Glasses* in the context of critical efforts to reconceptualise literary modernism. As I have noted, those efforts have sought to release modernism from stasis and geographical confinement – to figure it less as an exclusive and short-lived product of an Anglo-American elite writing in the 1920s and ’30s than as a dynamic response to the forces and conditions of modernity made by many writers, in many places and at many times.

As Morag Shiach has written, the tendency of orthodox scholarship to describe modernism “retrospectively and elegiacally, as a movement whose key moments and key figures were in the past” creates a problem for writers working after or alongside this tightly-defined movement – the problem of belatedness:

For writers in the 1930s, or even in the 1950s, who sought to engage with the radical energies of modernism or to connect their work to its aesthetic innovations, there was always a risk of feeling that it was too late, that the moment of modernism was behind them. (Shiach 28)

That *These Dark Glasses* is a victim of belatedness, that Texidor too has missed her “moment”, is a recurrent theme in the critical response to the novel.²⁷⁴ Yet if we think of *These Dark Glasses* not as a product of 1949, produced far from the cultural centre and historical moment it depicts, but as a text vitally engaged with modernism’s “radical energies” and “aesthetic innovations”, other readings become possible in which belatedness is not necessarily a failing. Texidor’s overlay of existentialist despair on the hedonistic Riviera milieu of the 1930s seems not so much anachronistic as intentionally proleptic. In *The Rock Pool* – whose retrospectivity the author himself acknowledged, calling it his “tardy settlement of an account ... with the nineteenth-twenties” (*The Rock Pool* x–xi) – Connolly has to rely on extra-textual means to signal the fate of Trou-sur-Mer’s inhabitants. His postscript to the 1947 edition itemises what happened to the real people on whom he based his characters: one succumbed to consumption, another was murdered in a Nazi concentration camp, a third died “in the black winter night above Germany” (*The Rock Pool* xii). But in *These Dark Glasses*, ‘what is to come’ is already embedded in the ‘now’ of the story. Texidor wants her readers to apprehend that when she describes Ruth and her acquaintances as “dancing on the edge of destruction” (78), she is not recycling a melodramatic figure of speech but foretelling the future. The certain knowledge of this world’s destruction – regardless of its inhabitants’ modish politics, their faith in the artist-as-revolutionary-hero and in the utility of slogans such as “solidarity” and “revolution” – is central to Texidor’s account of it. That most of her characters remain oblivious to a future known to herself, her readers and her protagonist – Ruth herself understands all too well the world of Calanques is “disappearing into the fog” (44) – is an important source of the novel’s painful and characteristically modernist irony.

If *These Dark Glasses* is indeed steeped in belatedness, then it is a quality shared by other mid-century writers whose modernist bona fides are steadily being rediscovered. Many are women writers whom scholars have tended to consider, if they have considered them at all, as positioned outside “the heroic modernist project” (Shiach 28). Referring especially to the scholarship of Bonnie Kime Scott, Shiach describes the emergence of a “larger and richer” modernist canon in which once-excluded writers such as Jean Rhys, Djuna Barnes and Rebecca West have reclaimed a place on the modernist map (29). To Shiach, their past neglect is symptomatic of the belatedness problem. Like Texidor, many of these marginalised writers were engaging creatively with modernism long after the iconic writers whom

²⁷⁴ Texidor herself conceded as much, telling Duggan that Reid “was justified in saying my book had dated. I agree” (Texidor to Duggan, June [1950?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

Wyndham Lewis dubbed “the men of 1914” (Davison 82) were dead or silent. In some cases, including Texidor’s, their fiction was published after years of silence or non-literary activity, a time lag that made it possible to characterise them as rather pitiable latecomers to the modernist party and their work as an irrelevant relict. For this reason, Shiach’s problem of belatedness can be seen as a political as well as a literary issue – one that tells us much about the construction of canons and movements, inclusions and exclusions, and how the politics of literary production particularly affect women writers.

John Newton has argued that the impact of modernism on New Zealand literature followed a rather different trajectory to other creative fields, notably architecture (Newton, “A Game”). Although the arrival of wartime European refugees (among whom Texidor can be counted, despite her English origins) was instrumental in exposing local writers to the full force of contemporary European modernism, just as it was for architects, the traces of that encounter on our literary history are less tangible and attributable. In architecture, the arrivals from continental Europe included Ernst Plischke and Heinrich Kulka, both fully-fledged modernist practitioners with substantial bodies of work behind them. There were no comparable figures in literature, certainly not writing in English.

But there was Greville Texidor. Although far from an established practitioner of the standing of Plischke or Kulka, she nonetheless represents a minor disruption to the pattern Newton describes. In *These Dark Glasses*, she asserts her modernist credentials, demonstrating her command of the stylistic, formal and thematic toolkit traditionally attributed to literary modernism. But she also writes herself into the larger, richer, messier narrative of intermodernism, taking her place alongside women writers like Storm Jameson, Rebecca West and Rosamond Lehmann. Their writing was shaped by the literature of high modernism, even as they were excluded from it by virtue of their times, their gender, their interrupted careers, their excursions into non-literary or populist genres, and their alleged ‘middlebrow’ tendencies. Texidor’s desire to write a popular novel with “a good set of characters ... firmly wedged between good solid hunks of scenery” is perhaps indicative.²⁷⁵ Typically, intermodernist writers considered they had a responsibility to their readers as well as to art; they wanted to be readable as well as to demonstrate their literary virtuosity. Writing in the 1940s and ’50s, many wanted to use a modernist aesthetic to explore the

²⁷⁵ Texidor to Dawson, undated [1949?]. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1, Folder 3. UA. See also chapter 7.2.

personal and social consequences of political commitment before, during and after the Second World War. Bringing all these concerns to bear on their fiction, they wrote as non-canonical modernists – or, in Elizabeth Maslen’s terms, as archetypal intermodernists, “passionately involved with their modernity, the issues of their time and place”, eager to “wrestle articulately, both in theory and practice, with how best to express their involvement, how to communicate their vision to their readers” (22).

CHAPTER 9

An appalling inner void: Texidor's existentialism

The existentialist vein in Texidor's writing that so discomforted Reid and other reviewers has been explored at length by Dale Benson in her thesis "A World Like This" (2000). For Benson, *In Fifteen Minutes* expresses "the development of a kind of existentialist sensibility" unprecedented in New Zealand fiction (Benson 182). Texidor's stories are animated not merely by "a cosmopolitan's dissatisfaction with provincial society", she says, but by a fundamental vision of the human condition that is "far more desolate ... than was imagined by her contemporaries" (194, 181). According to this vision, all social structures, ideals and institutions are fraudulent; all human endeavours must end in failure; all attempts to find meaning or happiness are ultimately fruitless.

Benson considers Texidor's existentialism the common thread that links her New Zealand stories with her European work. But she also finds in it a conscious connection with the new wave of European existentialist literature whose influence had, to a limited degree, begun to reach New Zealand in the 1940s. Texidor, Sargeson and their circle would have been familiar with Camus's *L'Etranger* and his essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (both 1942), Sartre's *La Nausée* (also 1942) and other work.²⁷⁶ And in Texidor's fiction, whether set in Europe or New Zealand, Benson finds ample evidence of a deliberate and thoughtful engagement with these writers' ideas and work. The depiction of Roy attempting to photograph his fiancée Lily in "Anyone Home?", for example, recalls "Sartre's grim interpretation of relations between the

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Benson acknowledges that the shortage of imported books in wartime New Zealand, together with stringent censorship, meant few readers would have had access to contemporary existentialist writing in English in the early 1940s. It was not until 1950, for example, that a New Zealand library acquired an English translation of Sartre's stories (Benson 80). Nonetheless, readers of overseas publications such as John Lehmann's *Penguin New Writing* would have encountered writing that explicitly or tangentially treated existential themes. For example, Lehmann's journal published Sartre's Spanish Civil War story "The Wall", which challenges conventional rhetoric about wartime heroism (no. 4, March 1941), Yuri Olyesha's "Love" (no. 9, September 1941), William Chappell's "The Sky Makes Me Hate It" (no. 13, April-June 1942) and Lehmann's own essay "The Search for the Myth" (no. 30, 1947), among others. Further evidence of a growing local interest in existentialism during this decade includes Canterbury College Drama Club's production of Sartre's play *The Flies* in the early 1940s and an article in the *New Zealand Listener* addressing "This Word 'Existentialism'" (5 April 1946, 9). Clearly, even if existentialist literature was not widely known, its influence was certainly in the air at the time Texidor was becoming a writer in New Zealand (see Benson 78–101 especially).

sexes, when one individual tries to entrap another by objectifying them through ‘the gaze’” (Benson 199).

Meanwhile in *These Dark Glasses*, *Goodbye Forever* and the story “Time of Departure” – whose protagonists confront a world in which political ideals and personal hopes of happiness have been extinguished – Benson finds explicit allusions to Camus’s retelling of *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The unfortunate king’s eternal task is to roll a boulder uphill, only for it to roll down again: usually, it is cast as a chronicle of despair and futile struggle in a godless world. In Camus’s re-telling, however, he insists that Sisyphus’s plight confers on him complete freedom and a kind of happiness. Stripped of all illusions, he is liberated to attempt anything: “His fate belongs to him ... [He] concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile ... The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart” (Camus 592–593). Benson describes Camus’s version, with its insistence that the absurd hero Sisyphus is happy, as “a treatise against suicide” (190). But Texidor interprets the myth more darkly; both she and her characters have “no cause for happiness in what she perceived to be a meaningless world”, says Benson, adding that Texidor refuses to believe “in the nobility of trying anyway” (182–183, 190). In *These Dark Glasses*, for example, once Ruth is robbed of both the ironically-named Victor and her political dreams, her struggle to find purpose in life is manifestly meaningless; death is its only possible conclusion. Texidor repeatedly signals the inevitability of this outcome through images of uphill struggle, the sickening fall, the welcome descent into oblivion. Dozing in the sun, Ruth dreams of slipping inexorably down a slope; elsewhere, she recalls seeing a young woman deliberately plunge to her death on a hillside, at first “slipping very slowly ... [then] faster. Then she went over the edge” (*Fifteen Minutes* 43–44). Noting the absence of gas ovens in Calanques, Ruth flirts briefly with drowning, allowing herself to sink down into the ocean, observing herself in the third person as she descends – “She said to herself, Mad’moiselle you are drowning. How near it is how very easy it is” (36). Finally, she decides to throw herself from the high jagged rock that dominates the town and bears the slogan *Vive le Parti Communiste*. It is a fitting point of departure for a failed political activist, whose valiant propaganda work on behalf of the communists in Spain now seems to her simply a rehearsal for this inevitable end: “It always seems too late to do any good. It’s like slipping down a hill. Everything goes so fast,” observes Ruth of her activism (44). *Goodbye Forever* also explores the Sisyphean myth and, to Benson, even more emphatically repudiates Camus’s optimistic belief in ongoing struggle as a valid response to a

world bereft of certainties. Here, Benson observes, there is no likelihood that the refugee Lili's situation will improve (Benson 204); only death can end it.

Benson mounts a convincing case for Texidor as New Zealand's first fully-fledged existentialist author. Her existential sensibility, Benson argues, imparts an underlying unity and continuity to her work – qualities obscured by the geographically-divided arrangement of *In Fifteen Minutes*, which invites us to notice the contrasts between the European and New Zealand stories more than their continuities. In fact, Benson says, the stories that unfold in the isolated farmhouses and empty paddocks of rural Northland “present the same world-view as the European stories”, despite their apparent dissimilarities (194). And although Benson does not appear to have read the fiction Texidor wrote later in Australia, this unpublished work (much of it set in camps accommodating the post-war tide of displaced persons) shares the same bleak world-view too.

In identifying this strong existentialist vein in Texidor's work, Benson draws a connection with Sargeson. She is not the first to assert Sargeson's existentialist credentials. Baxter wrote in 1954 that all Sargeson's work teetered on the brink of existentialism: his “insistence on detail ... is a web stretched over an appalling inner void; at times it wears thin and one can see the blackness underneath” (“Back to the Desert” 173). H. Winston Rhodes likewise saw in Sargeson a concern for profound existential questions that were “not confined to provincial or local attitudes”. Could, for example, the “predicament of a New Zealander” be understood as a variant of “the predicament of Western man” as much as a local phenomenon? (*Frank Sargeson* 47). However, Benson is careful to distinguish the particular complexion of Sargeson's existentialism from Texidor's. His stories may resonate with “the ‘dark wind’ of Camus which blows his protagonists towards failure” (Benson 107, quoting Baxter). But Sargeson, like John Mulgan (and Camus too), retains an optimistic belief in the “saving grace of mateship in a diminished world” that his protégée Texidor did not share (Benson 181).

Notwithstanding this distinction, the very fact that Sargeson and Texidor shared a kind of existentialist sensibility once again suggests the extent to which each was the other's ideal reader, for all their manifold differences in experience, personality and aspiration. Both were drawn instinctively to the groundnotes of bleakness and alienation that they heard in one another's work; both heard the “tiny music of the numb and spiritless” (Mason 243).

Acknowledging a common existential thread in the work of Texidor and Sargeson also allows us to situate them, and other writers working in New Zealand in the 1940s, rather differently. Here is a group of writers far from the metropolitan centre against which, throughout the preceding decade, many local artists had felt compelled to turn their backs in a demonstration of indigeneity. Now, at least some of these writers – Sargeson, Texidor, Duggan, Kavan, Mulgan and, later, Frame – are deliberately engaging with a panorama of universal mid-twentieth century anxieties and attitudes, both literary and political, and bringing them to bear on the “local and special” (Curnow, *PBNZV* 1960 17). Rather than static figures in an insular backwater, preoccupied with reproducing an exclusively local reality, they can be re-imagined as swimmers in a broad global current of contemporary literary practice. Seen through this lens, many of their preoccupations – the isolation of the outsider, the varieties of homelessness, the disenchantments of false ideologies and rhetoric, the discovery described by Duggan (quoting Maupassant) “that all things are a weariness”²⁷⁷ – are not particular to the colonial predicament of a remote island nation, but belong to the larger post-war world.

For all these reasons, it is certainly illuminating to think of Texidor as an existentialist writer. However, as an all-encompassing label, ‘existentialist’ seems both insufficient and overly schematic. Firstly, it suggests more of a fully-formed, polished practitioner and a more uniform body of work than is supported by the evidence. Despite enjoying some publishing success during her time in New Zealand, Texidor was still an apprentice writer when she left this country, still consciously experimenting with her voice, method and material. While a studied existentialist mood certainly pervades *These Dark Glasses*, for example, it is not consistently maintained across the published stories. In others, Texidor is trying out other moods and attitudes with the same appetite she shows for stylistic experimentation. As I have shown, the vocabulary of European modernism rubs up against the new idiom she was learning from Sargeson and hearing around her in New Zealand. The Sargesonian plainness that characterises parts of some stories (“Home Front”, for example) sits alongside passages in which chronology, language and syntax are embellished, manipulated and deliberately disrupted (such as “Time of Departure”). Even within a single story (*Goodbye Forever* is a notable example), bleak affirmations of the meaninglessness of human existence can be found alongside acerbic social satire. Such hybridity and range establishes the collection as a

²⁷⁷ Duggan to Texidor, undated [1945?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-10. ATL.

developing and uneven body of work, surely too provisional and experimental to be classified as ‘existential fiction’.

Secondly, to read Texidor purely as an existentialist seems a particularly ill-suited approach to a writer whose experiences before arriving in New Zealand had surely instilled in her a contempt for all kinds of “-isms” – communism, Marxism, fascism, pacifism and aestheticism among them. Once in New Zealand, she almost certainly recoiled from other totalising ideologies she encountered. Stories such as “Elegy”, “An Annual Affair”, “Anyone Home?” and *Goodbye Forever*, for example, take delight in skewering leftist progressivism, patriotism, puritanism and intellectualism. After *These Dark Glasses* was savaged by J.C. Reid, E.P. Dawson told Texidor of wanting to publicly defend it as a book written not by an existentialist, but “by one who *faces* despair rather than give in to an -ism” (my italics).²⁷⁸ Dawson’s insightful comment may have brought Texidor some comfort: it is certainly hard to imagine her acquiescing readily to the rigidities of the “existentialist” label – or indeed to any.

²⁷⁸ Dawson to Texidor, undated [1950?]. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1 Folder 2. UA.

CHAPTER 10

Postscript: Australia and after

By the late 1940s, Texidor had become increasingly restless and dissatisfied with New Zealand. It was too far from anywhere that mattered to her, and too uncongenial an environment for the writing life she now considered her proper *métier*. As Sargeson recalled in his memoirs, the years of police monitoring and general mistrust had also taken their toll, leaving her anxious and occasionally paranoid (*Never* 67).

Moreover, the key relationships that had sustained her since Paparoa and supported her growth as a writer were changing. Duggan had married, altering the dynamics of their friendship. The genuine companionship and affection she enjoyed with Sargeson had also cooled. In her early years on the North Shore, they had visited disreputable Auckland pubs together, gone to movies, holidayed together at Mount Maunganui.²⁷⁹ A contemporary remembered them “walking together and ha[ving] fun making up parodies of the Georgian poets”.²⁸⁰ Texidor had even been invited to join Sargeson on a trip to his “most truly spiritual place”, his Uncle Oakley’s King Country farm, but the visit was called off at the last minute (*More* 111). He addressed her as “La Texibubble” or “Dearest Greville you lovely Thing”, writing her gossipy letters whose tone differed markedly from the bluff masculine manner he used with his younger male protégés.²⁸¹ But by 1946, Texidor was finding Sargeson difficult and “incredibly bitchy”; she told Cole that while she could “take a lot from Frank because he has been so good to me at times”, she was disinclined to visit him.²⁸² She seems to have found the combination of Sargeson and Ian Hamilton – Werner Droescher had become involved in his short-lived New Life Colony in Kerikeri – particularly aggravating. Together,

²⁷⁹ Texidor to Sargeson, 26 September 1953. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-182. ATL; Sargeson to Dawson, 6 February 1944. Dawson, Letters MS-2404/002. HC.

²⁸⁰ Unnamed correspondent to Michael King, undated. Dr Michael King Papers, MS-Group-0667, 97-042-20/12. ATL.

²⁸¹ See for example Sargeson to Texidor, 3 April 1945 and 16 October 1950. Greville Texidor Literary Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1, Folder 2. UA.

²⁸² Texidor to Cole, 31 January 1946. Cole Papers, MS-Papers-4648-17. ATL.

they were pure malice, she told Duggan, a pair of “rather sinister old Aunties” sowing disharmony with their “slimy little secrets”.²⁸³

Sargeson’s myriad health and financial worries over this period, detailed by his biographer Michael King, doubtless made him difficult company, as did the artistic frustrations I have outlined in Part Two. But Texidor’s own behaviour could be challenging. According to her elder daughter, she had frequent bouts of depression and “tremendous highs and lows”. There were rifts with friends, family and lovers (Greville and Werner had an open marriage) and “weeping in the night” was not uncommon.²⁸⁴ Sargeson found Texidor’s “almost pathological” outbursts increasingly exasperating. Asked to write a brief foreword to some Lorca translations for *Angry Penguins*, she had broken down and “declar[ed] that it can’t be done”, he complained to Dawson. All that was needed was for her “to be temporarily sensible, come out of her dream, use her commonsense, be lucid”, but this seemed beyond her.²⁸⁵ He vented his frustrations to Under-Secretary for Internal Affairs Joseph Heenan in 1948 with characteristic man-to-man misogyny, describing Texidor as “trying, certainly – but women in their forties, you know. One must give them time to settle down for the last few furlongs” (Shieff, *Letters* 114).²⁸⁶

Texidor’s personal circumstances had changed too. In 1947, when she was 45, her daughter Rosamunda was born and her writing time was necessarily restricted. Her only contact with books, she told Duggan, was when Cristina (now aged seventeen) read to her while she washed nappies; even then, “at my back I always hear the vacuum cleaner hurrying near”.²⁸⁷ She complained of being abandoned by acquaintances who seemed “scared to be alone in a room with ... a neurotic erotic old party who suffers from delusions & persecution mania”.²⁸⁸ Sargeson and Hamilton were among her few remaining friends, and “I used to sit down, when

²⁸³ Texidor to Duggan, undated [1947?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL. She added: “I am now beginning to suspect that I am a sinister old Auntie myself & this is why they are rather horrible.”

²⁸⁴ Interview with Cristina Patterson Texidor, 22 April 2015.

²⁸⁵ Sargeson to Dawson, 14 September 1944. Dawson, MS-2404/002. HC.

²⁸⁶ After lobbying by Sargeson, Heenan had provided state funding to enable the publication of *These Dark Glasses* in 1949. Sargeson’s remarks echo his condescending dismissal of Robin Hyde, on the eve of her departure for China, as “a trying old thing” (Sargeson to Glover, 2 February 1938, Shieff 20).

²⁸⁷ Texidor to Duggan, two undated letters [early 1948?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

²⁸⁸ Texidor to Duggan, undated [1947?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

I ever had time off from my household duties, and wonder which one of them I disliked the most”.²⁸⁹ Underlying her unhappiness was the pathological fear of ageing which would grip her for the rest of her life: “of course what is really wrong is that I am confined in a private Belsen of being older than everyone I like.”²⁹⁰

By the beginning of 1948, Texidor had resolved to leave Auckland for Brisbane with Rosamunda, “tho not with any particular enthusiasm”. She was not attracted to Australia but simply needed to get away from “the narrowness of New Zealand”, she told Duggan, fearing she would “crack up” if she remained (Richards 103–104). Werner followed her some months later, as did the dependable Mrs Foster.²⁹¹ In Brisbane, Werner found casual work and the family lived in a garage in the seaside suburb of Redcliffe. While Texidor found Australians friendly and “more nonchalant” than New Zealanders – “they don’t give a damn about anything as far as I can see, except keeping their own vast continent white and British” – Brisbane itself was even more “prim and wowserish” than Auckland: “Culture is absolutely nil, vitality a great deal lower than Sydney, and it’s full of notices saying you mustn’t. ... I can smell Methodism pretty close,” she reported.²⁹² Despite their difficult living circumstances, she clearly intended to continue writing and eagerly awaited the publication of *These Dark Glasses*, whose proofs Sargeson was checking. Meanwhile, she entertained him with an account of appearing at a Queensland Artists and Authors Association event alongside a visiting English writer, where the organiser

got in a terrible tangle with my names but mentioned that I was a noted short story writer and that the N.Z. Gov. was backing my latest novel about N.Z. life and customs and then there was some mention of Conrad and it was a great achievement for a young writer not writing in her own language. Then I was asked to rise and of course I knew exactly what to say – how it was such a pity that the bonds between N.Z. and Australian writers were not closer – and writers with international reputation – such as Frank Sargeson – but you know how awkward I am in public. In private too for that matter. And the other distinguished guest of the evening (from England) who was planted next to me, and who probably was really a writer being so like the pictures you see of them ... did even less.²⁹³

²⁸⁹ Texidor to Duggan, 28 August 1950. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

²⁹⁰ Texidor to Duggan, undated [1947?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

²⁹¹ Cristina remained behind in Auckland, until moving to Europe in 1950 with her husband, the painter Keith ‘Spud’ Patterson.

²⁹² Texidor to Cole, 4 December [1948?]. Cole Papers, MS-Papers-4648-17. ATL.

²⁹³ Texidor to Sargeson, Saturday [1948?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-182. ATL.

In 1949, the family moved to the Blue Mountains in New South Wales after Werner got a job teaching English at a displaced persons' camp. At the time, the camp at Bathurst housed up to 7,000 people, drawn from all corners of Europe (although, puzzlingly, all were referred to locally as 'Balts'): "Ex-nazis and Jews from Belsen rub shoulders. Latterly we have been getting Americanised Russians from China but today we are having Albanians," Texidor explained to Cole.²⁹⁴ Again, the family's living conditions were basic – they lived in barracks alongside the migrant families, and shared the same institutional food – but she found the experience stimulating nonetheless. Being amongst migrants "and yet a little out of it (being at least in their eyes not a D.P.) helped to knot together some of the loose threads in my European self", she reported to Duggan, while she told Sargeson that "[w]hen the curtains (army blankets) are drawn and the coffee brewed it is just like Milford [on the North Shore] because the same sort of people come to sit round in the evenings."²⁹⁵ Moreover, the camp offered undeniably rich pickings for a writer. Despite often having to work by candlelight, she began writing a novel, provisionally titled *Days of Hope*, about a left-wing European activist recently arrived in Australia as a refugee.²⁹⁶ She also wrote an essay about camp life, which (after Sargeson had corrected her reliably atrocious spelling and punctuation) she submitted to *Landfall* and *Penguin New Writing*. Both turned it down, but it later appeared in the journal *Here & Now* (March 1951) under the title "Bogomil – Kaffka – Timoshenko". Perhaps sensing Texidor's confidence was waning, Sargeson was full of praise for this piece of reportage, and urged her to do more.

But Texidor was finding it increasingly difficult to write. The camp was cold in winter, always noisy and full of disruptions. Domestic chores were time-consuming. No one there seemed interested in *These Dark Glasses* when copies arrived from New Zealand, and books and intellectual stimulation were both in short supply. Sargeson urged her simply to keep writing; it was a productive way to deal with the war-related anxieties and remorse he suspected were beginning to paralyse her, along with her wavering discipline and self-belief. Congratulating her on the novella's publication, he advised "that's your solution old dear –

²⁹⁴ Texidor to Cole, 25 October [1949?]. Cole Papers, MS-Papers-4648-17. ATL.

²⁹⁵ Texidor to Duggan, undated [June 1950?]. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL; to Sargeson, 8 July [1949?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers-0432-182. ATL.

²⁹⁶ Texidor to Dawson, undated [1949?]. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198 Box 1, Folder 3. UA.

just write another one, and remember the past only in what you write. For the rest – forget about it”.²⁹⁷

Texidor and her family left the camp in late 1949. They moved between various small towns in New South Wales where Werner found teaching positions, and were finally able to buy thirty hectares of bush-clad land at Hazelbrook in the Blue Mountains. They lived in an old house on the site while Werner built huts to accommodate visiting friends from Sydney. As she had on the North Shore, Texidor could again surround herself with people who shared her literary and political interests. There were occasional weekends away in Sydney, where she would visit friends in King’s Cross, then the centre of Australian radical intellectual and cultural life. She made new literary friendships with, among others, the novelist Kylie Tennant whose fictional portrayals of the poor and unemployed had earned her the unwelcome epithet “the Australian John Steinbeck” in the 1940s (J. Grant, 497); publisher Max Harris; and Barrett Reid, poet, librarian and literary editor who recalled Texidor as “a very beautiful woman [with] a surprisingly brittle manner ... [I]t was not easy on short acquaintance to make a true friendship or get below the deliberately constructed surface.”²⁹⁸ According to her daughter Rosamunda, who spent much of her childhood at Hazelbrook, “Greville did enjoy some of the time there. The Hazelbrook ‘scene’ is remembered by quite a few of that generation here and it involved other people going up there and putting up huts as well. It was a sort of a country fringe of Sydney’s ‘bohemia’”.²⁹⁹

But by this time, Texidor was despondent about her own writing. To Sargeson, she dismally summarised her output: “half a dozen abortions of short stories, the makings of a migrant novel and apart from that only translations and a radio play which is designed to be popular”.³⁰⁰ In fact, she wrote two radio plays and both were broadcast by the ABC in 1952–53 – “The Laughing Spirit”, based on a Māori myth, and “Death of a Gypsy”, Texidor’s translation of a text by Lorca. A handful of her other Lorca translations appeared in *Ern Malley’s Journal*,³⁰¹ and one (“He Died at Dawn”) was accepted by New Directions in New

²⁹⁷ Sargeson to Texidor, 27 April 1949. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1, Folder 2. UA.

²⁹⁸ Reid to R. Droescher, 27 January 1988. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 12. SLNSW.

²⁹⁹ R. Droescher to F. Barrowman, 7 July 1987. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 12. SLNSW.

³⁰⁰ Texidor to Sargeson, 16 June [1950?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-0432-182. ATL.

³⁰¹ The literary magazine (1951–55) Max Harris, John Reed, Sunday Reed, Barrett Reid and others founded after the collapse of *Angry Penguins* (1940–46). Its title exploited the notorious Ern Malley

York for publication in the *Selected Poems of Lorca* (1954).³⁰² But many more translations were never published.³⁰³ They survive among the other unpublished material held in archives in Australia and New Zealand, alongside a play set in Holloway Prison, drafts of her refugee camp novel (including a detailed month-by-month plan for completing it), the multiple versions of *Diary of a Militia Woman*, and various non-fiction pieces – including a satiric essay titled “A Collector’s Rejection Piece”. In it, Texidor claims her speciality field “is the rejection letter and I can fairly claim to be an expert in it. Other writers, I am aware, have amassed larger collections, but mine is, I believe, unsurpassed for variety and originality.”³⁰⁴

Although Texidor remained capable of self-satire, she was deeply troubled. Apart from the traumatic and seemingly unending process of revising *Diary of a Militia Woman*, her writing had dried to an “anaemic flow”.³⁰⁵ Whatever she had sought by leaving New Zealand, she had not found it in Australia – a country that now seemed to her “just as far away as N.Z. and there is practically no writing”.³⁰⁶ In 1953, Texidor’s mother Editha, her dependable life-long anchor, died. The following year, Texidor attempted suicide after the end of an unsatisfactory affair. She became increasingly determined to return to Europe, telling Duggan she was “booking, unbooking, not believing much in going to England, France, Germany, Spain, and not caring much”.³⁰⁷ In preparation for another departure, she burned copious manuscripts and letters, apart from Duggan’s, which she stored among her tablecloths.³⁰⁸

hoax of 1944, whereby Reed and Harris (then editors of *Angry Penguins*) were duped into publishing ‘modernist’ poems by a purportedly undiscovered Australian literary genius, Ern Malley. In fact, Malley and his haphazard outpourings were the invention of two traditionalist poets intent on ridiculing what they saw as pretentious and meritless modernist verse. The hoax took an unforeseen turn when parts of the Malley poems were judged to be obscene: Harris was convicted and fined for publishing them, forcing the closure of *Angry Penguins* (Harris).

³⁰² D.M. Allen (New Directions) to Texidor, 17 December 1954. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 21. SLNSW. Texidor told Sargeson nervously that New Directions had sent her translations to Lorca’s brother for his approval, which was evidently forthcoming: “I feel as if someone had said: As Jesus Christ is dead St John will have a look at your translations” (Texidor to Sargeson, 14 July [?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-0432-182. ATL).

³⁰³ Australian writers have told Rosamunda Droescher that “the familiarity of Sydney writers with Lorca was due to Greville’s presence in the early 50s” (R. Droescher to F. Barrowman, 7 July 1987. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 12. SLNSW).

³⁰⁴ MS. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 2, Folder 17. SLNSW.

³⁰⁵ Unpubl. workbook. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1, Folder 7. UA.

³⁰⁶ Texidor to Sargeson, 12 September [1949?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-0432-182. ATL.

³⁰⁷ Texidor to Duggan, 19 October 1954. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

³⁰⁸ Texidor to Duggan, 6 December 1954. Duggan Papers, MS-Papers-1760-09. ATL.

By 1955, Texidor was back in Barcelona, where she rented a top-floor flat in the heart of the old quarter. After searching for a house in the country, she returned to Tossa de Mar in 1956 with Werner and Rosamunda. They found it much-changed, particularly by the advent of cheap mass tourism. Texidor purchased Can Kars, formerly the home of the Jewish-Czech painter Georges Kars, and it seemed for a time that she might resume her writing. Her former brother-in-law and fellow-writer Sherry Mangan, with whom she continued a lively correspondence, was endlessly encouraging. “Mark my words, honeychile,” he wrote in 1956, “if you get 500 to 1000 words on paper every day, neither weather nor anything else can get you too far down”.³⁰⁹ Even painful events were valuable, he counselled: “As we aging beauties and geniuses steer our way through deaths and illnesses and separations and poverties and incompetences and misunderstandings and lonelineses, we should learn, if we have guts, that it is all material.”³¹⁰ And after their final face-to-face meeting (Mangan stayed with Texidor in early 1960, a year before his death in Rome), he exhorted her to keep thinking of herself as a writer in terms that sounded very much like Sargeson:

During this stay ... I have learned to admire and respect you, as well as continue to feel very fond of you; and my only real regret, I suppose, on rough trial balance, is that I have failed in my effort, sometimes direct and nagging, sometimes indirect and stimulating, to get you back on to that typewriter. But I cling to the hope that my so far fruitless efforts may prove fruitful à retardement, like time bombs, and that, once you are settled somehow for the summer, you will begin once more to be productive.³¹¹

But the hoped-for revival of Texidor’s writing life did not eventuate. Instead, she turned her energies in new directions. In partnership with an English friend from her dancing-girl days, she set up an English tea-shop at Can Kars, offering the comforts of home to English tourists getting their first taste of the Costa Brava. In a letter to Sargeson, she described this latest reinvention: “This year I represent Wayfarers. You know the agency with the friendly atmosphere. [Tourists] step from the train right into my bosom. Dependable, well balanced, well groomed, coppery hair tints, call me Margaret. ... [T]he nice people from Wigan are so rewarding”.³¹² But behind the brittle humour, Texidor’s life was becoming increasingly unstable. She was often disabled by depression, and in poor physical health – her letters of

³⁰⁹ Mangan to Texidor, 23 February 1956. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1, Folder 2. UA.

³¹⁰ Mangan to Texidor, 19 December 1960. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1, Folder 2. UA.

³¹¹ Mangan to Texidor, 2 March 1960. Texidor Papers, MSS & Archives A-198, Box 1, Folder 2. UA.

³¹² Texidor to Sargeson, undated [1956?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-0432-182. ATL.

this period refer to unspecified kidney and liver troubles that required medical investigation in London. She and Werner had grown estranged, and she feared he would leave her. Kate Kurzke recalled her sister's panic at the prospect: "Greville said to me 'But I must have a husband. I have always had one'. ... G. went to pieces when she had not a man in the background. Not at all independent." Moreover, "she was fighting a losing battle against old age and the fading of her beauty and sex attraction, unable to hold her husband or her children – she could not bear that, and was heavily hooked on drugs".³¹³ Returning to Tossa where she had once been happy and energetically engaged with life, only to find the place, and herself, much-changed, had been a grave mistake, Kate considered:

[O]ne had the very sad spectacle of a person still vital and attractive but who had lost the power of concentration for the creative work which she inwardly needed to do – frittering away all this energy and talent, restless, frustrated. ... She was like a ghost in Europe.³¹⁴

After the final split with Werner, who returned to New Zealand in 1961 to take up a teaching position at the University of Auckland, Greville moved listlessly between England and Spain. In 1962, she returned to Australia with a Spanish boyfriend, and lived in Sydney with Rosamunda. Years earlier, she had told a friend that she would return to Hazelbrook only to die. In 1964, she did indeed return to her former home and it was there that she took her life. In her last letter to the Duggans, she had written from Barcelona:

I feel too old to take that terrible journey & start a home ... I am rather old for starting things alone ... Since coming to Spain I have not been able to write and least of all a letter to a friend ... I hope I won't be an echo soon myself. (quoted in Richards 319)

During the Second World War, Sargeson and Texidor had holidayed together at E.P. Dawson's home in Mount Maunganui. Having observed her mounting agitation at being required to report to the local police as an enemy alien, Sargeson had wondered: "How could the intelligent but unstable Texidor cope with a world in which forces of this kind could at any moment be let loose?" (*Never* 67). For a few brief years in Auckland, Texidor had perhaps found an answer to Sargeson's question: she could cope by writing, by turning a deeply-felt and intensely-lived life into bitter, sardonic, politically-engaged fiction. But once the writing stopped, only the agonising intensity of feeling and loss, the bitterness and the scorn remained. Returning to Spain and Hazelbrook served only to exacerbate the passage of

³¹³ Kurzke to Sargeson, two undated letters [both 1976?]. Sargeson Papers, MS-Papers 4261-097, ATL.

³¹⁴ Kurzke to Hamilton, undated. Hamilton Papers, MS-Papers-5597-03, ATL.

time and all she had lost. “Finally”, Sargeson conjectured, “there remained only the one thing for her to do, and that was what she did” (*Never* 68).

CONCLUSION

If literary value is predicated on the extent of a writer's published oeuvre, Texidor's might well be judged negligible. In her lifetime, she published just seven short stories, a novella with a very limited print run, and a handful of other brief works. One story earned a place in Sargeson's *Speaking for Ourselves* (1945) and another in Davin's *Classic New Zealand Short Stories* (1953). Since her death, a small collection of her fiction has appeared and a few stories have been anthologised or republished elsewhere.

It is an undeniably slender body of work, and it has been largely overlooked or dismissed in accounts of mid-century New Zealand literature. At best, she figures as an exotic footnote, or as a glamorous bit-player in Sargeson's circle. But Texidor's marginality derives not only from the meagreness of her publication record; it is symptomatic, too, of the persistence of nationalism as a yardstick of literary value. Forty years ago, Ian Wedde likened the critical preoccupation with national identity to "kicking a dried turd", a childish obsession that mattered to only the most reactionary and myopic of literary commentators (Roberts, "Nationalism" 393). But such questions have always shadowed critical estimations of Texidor's work. If she has been mentioned at all in general literary histories, it has been largely by virtue of her colourful foreign past or the outsider's gaze she turned on the monotonous mid-century cultural and social landscape. Patrick Evans describes the desolate New Zealand of her stories as something that could only have been imagined by an alien (*History* 143) while, to Lawrence Jones, her connection with New Zealand literature is a kind of "historical accident" (*Picking Up the Traces* 341). Patrick Macaskill, reviewing *These Dark Glasses* in the *Arts Year Book* (1950), noted how in this work at least, she was "not identified with the New Zealand scene, nor, in fact, with any other" (148). Even Sargeson characterised Texidor as a literary visitor, situating her alongside Lady Barker, Charles Darwin and Samuel Butler ("Greville Texidor" 135). It is scarcely surprising, then, that Smithyman's introduction to *In Fifteen Minutes* is at pains to establish Texidor's credentials as a New Zealand writer, as if this were a necessary condition of our continuing attention.

Perhaps all that needs to be said on this count is that Greville Texidor was a New Zealand writer more than she was a writer of any other nation. She had never ventured into fiction before coming to New Zealand, and nearly all her published work was written here. It was this seemingly uncongenial country alone, and the author who more than any other has been decisively conflated with its national fable, that together enabled Texidor's emergence as a writer. Tellingly, once removed from these influences, her writing dwindled and finally

ceased completely. It is difficult, in fact, to think of any other mid-century writer who was so comprehensively ‘made’ in New Zealand, and unmade without it.

It seems more productive to think about Texidor’s effective exclusion from the canon of New Zealand literature not as evidence of her shaky claim to genuine New Zealand-ness, but as evidence of a persistent reluctance to accommodate the aberrant, the anomalous and the unclassifiable within what Newton calls our favourite historical narratives (“Allen Curnow” 28). Dominated by Pākehā nationalism, masculinism and realism, orthodox accounts of New Zealand’s mid-century literature have left little room for other literary sensibilities and ways of writing – feminine, Māori, exilic, cosmopolitan, modernist, experimental and more. Now, since scholars such as Calder, Newton, Murray, Leggott, Stafford, Wevers, Williams and others have reframed our understanding of the literary landscape, such alternatives have emerged from the long shadow cast by the nationalist-realist monolith and demanded our attention.

It is in the context of this revisionist scholarship that I have examined Texidor’s neglected achievement. Certainly, the body of fiction she produced – and here I include the work written after she left New Zealand which remains in archives, little in a publishable condition – is as variable in quality as it is in subject matter and style. It is also frustrating in its incompleteness. Despite the sophistication of *These Dark Glasses*, and the genuine accomplishment of some of the shorter fiction published throughout the 1940s, Texidor was still very much an apprentice writer when she left this country. With the support of Sargeson and Duggan, and also through her own perseverance, she was learning how to harness her intensity of feeling to an underlying narrative framework, and to imbue it with a degree of forward narrative momentum. She had seen how descriptive economy and disciplined revision could lend greater potency to her instinctively lyrical, atmospheric prose. As Smithyman notes in his introduction to *In Fifteen Minutes*:

She was travelling fairly fast, learning as she went. She was learning about questions as she set herself problems, for instance, of (crudely) direct and indirect narration and (no way so crudely) of registers in dialogue and tonality. That she could not always solve her problems is for us to regret. (introduction 20)

Any number of reasons can be advanced to explain the decline of Texidor’s career as a published author. The deterioration and ultimate loss of her sustaining relationships with Sargeson and Duggan was crucial: the correspondence shows the extent to which it was by

collectively working through the technical problems Smithyman alludes to (and other problems too) that Texidor was able to solve them. Sargeson in particular – with his signature blend of attentiveness, encouragement, practical support and overbearing dogmatism – seems to have given her the discipline and purpose she needed to be a working writer. To publisher Fergus Barrowman, who selected many of the stories for *In Fifteen Minutes* from a suitcase full of unpublished manuscripts and notes, Texidor seems “someone who found it very hard to finish anything”, especially without Sargeson’s rigorous oversight.³¹⁵ The number of abandoned drafts dating from her years in Australia bear out this diagnosis. Meanwhile Smithyman offers a psychoanalytical explanation for Texidor’s increasing silence, writing opaquely and without elaboration of “the neurosis of failure, where succeeding is the dangerous thing” (introduction 20). That Texidor was increasingly disabled by depression, and by the after-effects of her Civil War experiences and subsequent imprisonment, is inarguable. Her conflicted literary ambitions also became inhibiting, especially in the uncongenial cultural environment she encountered in Australia. What sort of writer did she want to be and by whom did she want to be read? On the one hand, she aspired to all the accoutrements of high modernist fiction – the glittering shards, the dream language, the symbols, the “hiatus lagoons lacuna”, the psychological landscapes. But, as I have already observed, she also sought to chronicle the materiality of the world ‘out there’. Moreover, she wanted to be published, even to produce a best-seller. Could so multifarious a project ever accommodate the more avant-garde literary practices that attracted her? The fiction she produced in Australia reveals an ongoing struggle to reconcile these conflicting impulses. Perhaps the impossibility of working out which of “the two Grevilles” she wanted to be contributed to her decision to stop writing altogether.³¹⁶

Moreover, as a writer who had both thoroughly assimilated the European modernist tradition and begun putting it to new purposes in the post-war antipodean world, Texidor’s move to Australia came at a highly inopportune time. In the 1930s and 1940s, surrealism and modernism had left their mark on Australian cultural life to a degree that had not happened in New Zealand; in particular, the literary journal *Angry Penguins* had helped “[bring] together socialist and modernist interests” in both the visual arts and literature (Barrowman, *Popular Vision* 6). But its demise following the Ern Malley hoax of 1944 unleashed a popular

³¹⁵ Interview with Fergus Barrowman, 13 September 2013.

³¹⁶ See p166 for Sargeson’s comment on “the two Grevilles”.

backlash against modernist experimentation and a concomitant retreat into conservatism, notwithstanding the presence of an always-refractory avant-garde to which Texidor had links (see “The Sydney Push”). As the poet and publisher Barrett Reid acknowledged, by the early 1950s “a hostile philistinism had attacked and demoralised modernism’s project” (in Burke 308). Once again, as when *These Dark Glasses* was published, Texidor found herself a writer whose work seemed out of step with its times and the place in which it was produced. She struggled to publish in 1950s Australia, a predicament whose sources and consequences – for other writers, as well as Texidor – merit more scholarly attention.

Thus, any estimation of Texidor’s achievement needs to reckon with two inescapable realities: the slenderness of the body of work she left behind, and the incompleteness of her literary project. The archival material is a constant and frustrating reminder of suspended development. The multiple typescripts of *Diary of a Militia Woman* contain passages of considerable power and originality, especially in their treatment of war as both a quotidian social activity – a job like any other – and a surreal act of physical and psychic violence. Yet despite (or perhaps because of) Texidor’s obsessive reworking, the novel’s potential remains unrealised, an abandoned work whose literary qualities are ultimately overwhelmed by the twin burdens of confession and therapy its author requires it to bear. Another unfinished work that warrants further critical attention, and perhaps publication, is the alternative and much-expanded version of “Goodbye Forever”, tellingly titled “Goodbye But Not Forever”. It equips the refugee Lili with a much fuller European back-story, which is allowed to erupt periodically into the narrative of her steady unravelling in 1940s Auckland. Texidor’s satirical treatment of the North Shore literary circle is also considerably franker, perhaps to a degree that made her (or Sargeson, if he ever saw this version) uneasy about the advisability of publishing it.³¹⁷ Whether this expanded draft was Texidor’s original conception, or a later reworking of the version that appears in the Victoria University Press collection, is unclear. But it suggests why Texidor privately referred to “Goodbye Forever” as her “Gretel” novel: she was working with symbols and fable, braiding elements of the Hansel and Gretel story –

³¹⁷ For example, the male writer whose friendship with Lili is central to the story – and is clearly modelled on Sargeson – has the following exchange with his friend Ursula, a version of E.P. Dawson:

I mean you should know, I don’t love like ordinary people.

Oh that, Ursula dismissed it, we all know that.

It’s just not my way, I said. It’s just not my way. (MS. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 11. SLNSW)

complete with witch, stepmother and paternal abandonment – into Lili’s story.³¹⁸ She requires us to reconstruct Lili’s painful past out of a scattering of recollections and splinters of memory whose lyrical intensity recalls both “Time of Departure” and the abandoned “Aller Retour”, the story that had so powerfully stirred the young Maurice Duggan:

The scenic railway – Lili would like to spend her life on the scenic
railway, so swift the air, swift the change, then the fall with

everything in fragments it did not matter nothing mattered goodbye
forever goodbye everything left behind on the wonderful fall

into calm, dipping, and passing through a little still lake. Boats drifted.³¹⁹

Perhaps most strikingly, “Goodbye But Not Forever” is (like *These Dark Glasses*) a sustained and successful attempt to realise a character with whom Texidor empathises but who *is not her*. Freed from the tyranny of registering personal experience and its attendant emotional burdens, Texidor writes with the boldness, poise and dispassion she could only sometimes muster when working on *Diary of a Militia Woman*.

The unrealised and incomplete promise with which some of Texidor’s abandoned work is charged is, of course, a source of regret. But that “incompleteness” is also somehow intrinsic to her work, and to her brief participation in a literary culture that was in itself incomplete and unformed. Particular examples of her work might be labelled existentialist fiction – or exilic, New Zealand, political, war, realist or modernist fiction – but any one of these is insufficient as a totalising designation. From story to story, and sometimes even within stories, she slips between attempts to classify and contain her, her stylistic allegiances and geographical boundaries resolutely unfixed. She engages equally with warring Europe and with the brutal emptiness of New Zealand; her writing responds to both the political urgencies of the world around her and the workings of her own troubled mind. Various, she writes with political fervor and with weary cynicism, as an outsider and an insider, with austere plainness and with febrile lyricism, as a critical realist and a surrealist, as a social satirist and a navigator of the damaged human psyche. This fluidity means Texidor’s work can be usefully read in the context of the ongoing critical discourse about the porous boundaries and forms of literary modernism, and particularly the emerging field of intermodernism – a way of accounting for

³¹⁸ Interview with Rosamunda Droescher, 4 December 2014.

³¹⁹ MS. Texidor Papers, MLMSS 5235, Box 5, Folder 11. SLNSW.

largely neglected mid-century texts that bring the “radical energies” and “aesthetic innovations” of high modernism to bear on post-war experience (Shiach 28).

The other distinctive thread in Texidor’s writing is her treatment of the war in Spain. Although several New Zealand writers had engaged with the Civil War throughout the 1930s, almost none had done so in imaginative prose. Texidor writes about the Civil War not as a theoretical contest of ideologies, as other New Zealand writers had done, but on the basis of personal experience – including as a combatant. As I set out in chapter 7, her Spanish fiction thus occupies a unique position within the canon of New Zealand’s war writing, and also other canons. It departs from the expected conventions of women’s war writing, for example, while its overt anarchist sympathies differentiate it from most Spanish Civil War literature in English. Arguably, though, Texidor’s war writing is distinguished not so much by its author’s political stance but by her signature stylistic fluidity and range, by the rapid shifts between registers – from horror to comedy – and between diaristic reportage and a raft of non-naturalistic modes. Sometimes (as in “Maaree” or “Jesús Jiménez”) the effect of such disjunctions is powerful; in the case of Texidor’s most extensive piece of war writing, *Diary of a Militia Woman*, that power remains diffused and only partially realised.

Texidor is significant in New Zealand’s reimagined mid-century literary landscape not only by virtue of her own writing, however. She matters also because of her productive associations with other writers, particularly the dominant figure of Sargeson. Throughout this thesis, I have characterised Texidor as a revelatory, catalysing and complicating presence in Sargeson’s writing life. Initially dazzled by her exoticism and glamour, he soon came to recognise their unexpected affinities. Their encounter thus enacted in miniature the convergence of nationalist and exilic sensibilities taking place in wartime New Zealand, their compatibility refuting the argument that these mentalities operate as “conflicting poles of feeling” (Brennan 60). Thus in Texidor’s alien status, Sargeson saw reflected his own estrangement from Little Bethel; her willed “homelooseness” (Wood 6) was the correlative to his own marginality as a homosexual writer in a philistine and aggressively masculine community. Her pitiless critique of New Zealand’s suffocating and joyless puritanism affirmed his own damning social vision and that articulated by the cultural nationalists. In her company, he could express the deep (but also conflicted) attachment to the European cultural tradition that ran alongside his fierce commitment to the local scene; she, like Lehmann and

Plomer, offered vicarious access to the highbrow literary life of London, Paris and New York that both fascinated and repelled him.

The timing of the two writers' encounter was critical. Texidor entered Sargeson's life at the precise moment when, dismayed at the dead-end to which his austere and highly-crafted prose style had led, he was reinventing his writing for the post-war world. With her sophisticated, cosmopolitan, sexually-progressive and politically-engaged sensibilities, she was the ideal audience and sounding-board for the looser, freer writer he wished to become. Uninterested in the nationalist literary project, Texidor appreciated Sargeson's work for reasons other than its fidelity to the local scene: like his London literary friends, and like Brasch too, she valued the vein of suppressed poetry, its subtle rearrangement of reality, the sly narrative tricks and subterfuge.

And, just as Sargeson left an unmistakable impress on her work, so too Texidor left her mark on his. Particularly as he began writing longer fiction, she showed herself an astute reader of his work, her insightful critique informed by a thorough immersion in European literature and a pragmatic insistence on readability that matched Sargeson's own democratic instincts. But beyond valuing her critique, Sargeson was also stimulated by Texidor's imaginative writing. This possibility should not be overstated: despite his admiration for aspects of her prose, there is no documentary evidence, no drafts or even correspondence that show Sargeson ever regarded her work as a model. Yet loosely modernist techniques of the kind that characterise Texidor's prose increasingly inflect the fiction he was writing at the very time their friendship was closest. Texidor's work (like Duggan's and, later, Frame's) helped confirm Sargeson in his desire to move beyond the austere strictures of critical realism and the highly-compressed narrative form. The work of all three writers demonstrated that these were not the only tools that could be used in the service of 'the New Zealand scene', and helped release the discursiveness, suppleness and unconcealed literariness that animate his later work.

In this sense, it can be said that Texidor was an enabling agent of Sargeson's reinvention, just as he undoubtedly enabled her to invent herself as a writer in New Zealand. But while Sargeson moved forward towards a remarkable second career, Texidor was unable to keep developing the literary capabilities he had helped unlock – and that, as Smithyman says, “is for us to regret”.

* * *

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