Iris, Read and Written: A New Poetics of Robin Hyde

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Canterbury

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Abstract

Iris, Read and Written: A New Poetics of Robin Hyde.

This thesis is a textual analysis of Robin Hyde's poetics, drawn from her published and unpublished poetry, excluding the poetry manuscripts after 1938 which remain in the private Challis Collection, and with reference to her prose writings, particularly her final published volume Dragon Rampant, and her correspondence. It commences with an extended analysis of the Robin Hyde critical tradition, considering the relationships between the various orientations of the tradition, their strengths and limitations. My second chapter is concerned with the ways in which Hyde adopts the position of the heretic to question, in her early and middle poetry, the experiences of the gendered subject within the western Christian tradition. In Chapter 3 I analyse the ways in which Malory's Le Morte Darthur is an important text for Hyde: how it provides her with a means of accounting for her early experiences and gives rise to a complex presentation of her emotional life during her residence at the Lodge of the Auckland Mental Hospital at Avondale. In Chapter 4 I posit the influence on Hyde's poetics of Arthur Waley's translations from the Chinese as an alternative to readings which favour the idea of a conceptual and stylistic break in Hyde's later poetic subjectivity, and in the final chapter I am concerned with the consolidation and culmination of Hyde's poetics in her prose and verse writings from China.
Acknowledgements

Even so shall soul disdain the petty master,
Idle, shall mock the vexings of the mind.
('Lease Out No Pity', 15-16)

My supervisor, Associate Professor Patrick Evans, accepted me as his student at the end of 1996 when I was twenty-one, a stranger with a research proposal and grand ambitions. Since then he has never let me down.

My parents Gaynor and Michael Clayton and my brother John have supported me throughout this project and have always been confident of its completion. My grandfather Arthur Foster left a legacy with which my grandmother Joyce chose to pay for my undergraduate education, enabling me to complete my studies debt-free.

The University of Canterbury provided me with a Masters and later a Doctoral Scholarship, and the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee awarded me a William Georgetti Scholarship. The Department of English of the University of Canterbury assisted me with funding for travel to conferences in Melbourne and Dunedin, while the Riccarton-Waimairi Community Board gave me a Waimairi Study Award to contribute to the cost of my visits to archives in Wellington and Auckland.

The staff of the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, the Special Collections at the Auckland Central City Library, the New Zealand and Pacific Collection at the Library of the University of Auckland and the Hocken Library, Dunedin, were friendly and helpful during our
correspondence and my visits to them. Derek Challis gave me permission to view (and later quote from) manuscripts at the Auckland Central City Library and, together with his wife Lyn, made me welcome and graciously answered my many questions. Mary Paul of Massey University at Albany and Michele Leggott of the University of Auckland offered helpful comments on my project; Patrick Sandbrook of Massey University similarly encouraged me. Riemke Ensing, formerly of the University of Auckland, gave prompt and friendly replies to my inquiries about Gloria Rawlinson.

Brenda Allen provided mentorship in the early days of my thesis and was a patient office mate and trusted friend. My other office mates, Ken Mizusawa, Daniel Bedggood and Mandy Hawkey, shared with me the daily burdens of thesis writing. Sarah Mayo kindly proofread this thesis and offered suggestions on its final form. My friends Martyn Hentschel, Emily Watt, Chanel Hughes, André Prichard, Caron Chan and Kevin Ross provided me with support and enthusiasm from at home and abroad. Lal Baker, Emily Allen, Norna and Hannah Collingridge-Scott and my aunt and uncle Annette and Mike Hone hosted me in England during June and July 2000 and provided respite during my time as a cultural tourist. And Betty Mackenzie bred for me my dog Arthur, whose company is my delight.
A note on the text

All additions and omissions, including ellipses, that I have made to quoted texts are indicated in square brackets; thus ‘…’ indicates the author's original ellipsis and ‘[...]’ indicates an addition. An ellipsis of four full-stops, ‘[....]’, indicates an omission greater than two lines of poetry or one or two sentences of prose.

Quotations from Robin Hyde's 'Autobiography' and 'Journal' are made with the kind permission of Derek Challis. All unpublished poems by Robin Hyde are cited with their Auckland University manuscript number. In many cases, several versions of a poem exist with only very minor variations between them; thus 'AU 142.2' indicates the second of several variant copies. Where the variations between manuscript copies are minor I have exercised my discretion and chosen the version I like the most; since this thesis is interpretative and not editorial, my choice of variant is not intended to indicate any preference other than the purely subjective and should not be construed as intrinsic to my argument.

The Inventory of Poetry Manuscripts compiled by Michele Leggott and Lisa Docherty divides Hyde's manuscripts into six sections, as well as numbering them chronologically as in the example above. These sections provide a useful reference for the manuscripts' eventual destinations as well as their order of composition. Those relevant to this thesis are as follows:

1a / 1 -- 1a / 31.2
Poems pre-1930 not published in bookform.
2a / 73—2a / 196

3a / 356—3a / 378

4b / 446—4b / 477
Poems 1936 not published in bookform.

5b / 544.1—5b / 563
Poems 1937 not published in bookform.

5c / 564—5c / 608
Manuscripts 1937 (Leggott & Docherty, 7-9)

Numbers in brackets after poetry quotations, whether published or unpublished, indicate line numbers, except where the quotation is taken from another author, in which case the number indicates the page of the cited volume. All prose quotations are cited by page. Where needed, quotations from Hyde’s published writing include the initials of their volume, thus (AHITW, 23) indicates page twenty-three of A Home in this World. Where more than one volume of a critic is cited, I have included the year of publication, as in (Leggott 1999, xi). Endnotes follow each chapter; two appendices giving volume and page sources for all cited poems by Robin Hyde and translations by Arthur Waley are provided following the ‘Conclusion’.
Introduction: ‘Let us [...] sink into our own speech’¹

I will be wise for once, I will tell you what you are going to say. You are going to say ‘There is no difference, Ground is written on one side and Sky on the other.’ (Dragon Rampant, 270)

In 1997 I enrolled for a master’s degree by thesis, under the provisional title of ‘Feminism and post-colonial discourses in the novels of Robin Hyde, Jean Devanny and Katherine Susannah Prichard, 1925-1940’, a project whose planning reflected my interest in gender and post-colonial subjectivity. Four months into this project, having read a variety of critical commentaries on gender and subjectivity in national and postcolonial literatures, along with all the fiction of Prichard, a new edition of Devanny’s debut novel The Butcher Shop, and almost all the published fiction, prose and poetry of Hyde, my research aims began to change. After discussion with my supervisor, I resolved to abandon the writing of Prichard and Devanny in order to concentrate wholly on Hyde, whose prose I found remarkable for its complex and multiple exposures of the interplay of gender, colonialism and prevailing moralities.

Robin Hyde’s writing revealed for me a set of imaginative structures in which gender was just one component part among many, and although it was possible to read Hyde through an analytical lens conditioned exclusively by gender, this was no longer something I wanted to do. Convinced that an analysis of the interdependent political concerns of Hyde’s
writing would generate a theoretical framework close to that according to
which I imagined my master's research would proceed, I resubmitted my
abstract as a proposal for a PhD, entitled 'Settler Discourses: Robin Hyde and
Literary Dialectic'. The final months of the first year of what was now my
doctoral research were spent reading everything I could find about literary
culture in 1920s and 30s New Zealand, along with many of these decades'
texts themselves, in an attempt both to complete my general knowledge of the
artistic and cultural times and to see whether the dialectical model by which I
imagined the literary community of that time operated was sustainable.

In my research proposal of September 1997 I still anticipated that
my research would be primarily theoretical, providing a blanket reading of
1930s literary culture with specific reference to the writings of Robin Hyde,
whose prose I felt was more important than her poetry in supporting my
argument since it was both explicitly strategic and easily accessible. Indeed,
for much of its gestation I have imagined this thesis to be about prose rather
than poetry, and cultural theory rather than poetics; Chapter 5, which was the
first I wrote, is in method and conclusions the surviving example of what I
imagined my entire thesis would be and do. That the outcome has been
otherwise is an important part of the argument about Robin Hyde's writing.

Two factors came early to bear on my research that meant that my
intention to make a prose-based inquiry into settler subjectivity was in fact
impractical. The first was simply the amount of existing narrative and
analytical detail about Hyde's fiction, from Rawlinson's 1970 'Introduction'
to the Auckland University Press's reprint of *The Godwits Fly*, to a trio of theses completed in the early 1990s which included in their literary analyses close readings, followed by theoretical extrapolations, of the novels I myself had intended to examine. While the re-examination of literary texts is of course one of the 'givens' of academic research, I felt that while other sections of Robin Hyde's writing remained still largely unexplored (as was explicitly pointed out by Michele Leggott in a 1995 article), it was, in part, my responsibility to explore them in some small way.

The second factor which led me to move away from a fiction-based analysis of Robin Hyde's writing was the new Robin Hyde research projects which were beginning as I was commencing my own research. A group of academics and other researchers associated with the Universities of Auckland and Massey, as well as Hyde's son Derek Challis, received in 1998 a grant from the Marsden Fund to prepare for publication a number of Hyde's extant manuscripts: the 1934 'Autobiography', the 1935 'Journal', and the poetry manuscripts collection in the Iris Wilkinson Papers of the University of Auckland Library, as well as existing academic and archival research and the biography-in-progress that had been the collaborative effort of Challis and the late Gloria Rawlinson. The perception I had previously had of my research as a singular endeavour was thus revealed as redundant, while the diversity of the research the Auckland scholars were undertaking suggested to me that a more creative, less monolithic approach to Hyde's writing might be more in keeping with the current academic climate. My hunch in this regard was confirmed
during my meeting in September 1998 with the Auckland academic and poet Michele Leggott, who suggested to me that my research might best proceed as a consideration of what Robin Hyde herself had read.

At the same time as my knowledge of New Zealand’s historical and contemporary literary culture was increasing, along with my sense of a community of Robin Hyde researchers, my ambitions to be a writer of literary theory were waning. In my search for a descriptive cultural context in which to locate my reading of Robin Hyde, I grew increasingly aware of what seemed to me a crucial difference between the local academic and literary culture and the American and European communities out of which so many revisionary and indeed radical theories of language and the postmodern have come in the last thirty years. This difference I can best express through the idea of coverage: the Renaissance plays, bourgeois novels and Romantic poems, as well as the visual arts and contemporary architecture, which inform the critical writings of Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Linda Hutcheon, Frederic Jameson, Edward Said, Adrienne Rich and Elaine Showalter, to name but a few of those pertinent commentators whom I have read, have a cultural and textual history which is as monolithic and indeed multicultural as these writers' work is dense and international.

But the history of settler writing in New Zealand is different; any analysis of it reveals a tradition internally and reflexively figured in its very development with the elisions and hesitations, the instabilities and uncertainties, that contemporary theory seeks to reinscribe on the experience
of reading the western canon's grand literary and artistic narratives. If there is any constant in New Zealand's cultural production, it is surely self-conscious anxiety. The time may yet come when settler writing such as Robin Hyde's is chosen to exemplify a radical rethinking of the concepts literary research consensually depends on, but that is not the task I am undertaking in this thesis, despite my first intentions. What I am doing is exploring some of the new possibilities for research suggested to me by the example of the Marsden-funded scholars' textual diversification. I hope that it may stand alongside the other Robin Hyde research produced in the late 1990s and early 2000s as indicative of a cultural time and place, and that, should this research one day signify a tradition of hegemonic and discursive oppression, future critics will feel free to take it apart in order to put forward more radical and more pertinent points of view.

Thus, although the orientation of this thesis is textual rather than theoretical, that is not to say that it is without theory. In each of the chapters I have been anxious to explore the relationship between text, context and subtext in Hyde's writing, following, as I shall make clear in Chapter 1, what I take to be the strengths of the existing Hydian tradition. Although my argument disputes a number of the existing wisdoms about Hyde's writing, it does so in order to open up more possibilities for reading, and not to suppress received conclusions which continue to inform other extant, not to mention future, readings. Thus, though my first research interest was in gender, in my thesis it is, as I have explained, one of many contributing factors which I
acknowledge in my reading, existing in symbiosis with other concerns and not in the isolated and indeed privileged position I originally envisaged for it. In choosing subtext as one third of my methodological trinity I need to acknowledge the model set by Michele Leggott in her readings of Hyde's later poems, particularly the 'Houses by the Sea' sequence, as providing a precedent for me, and although I make what I hope are significant departures from Leggott's position, I am nonetheless following in part her critical example. Likewise, the importance of context as a politicising agent for reading has been asserted by Mary Paul in *Her Side of the Story*, the published version of her 1995 doctoral thesis. Both these critics have set an example of engaged, committed reading and I hope that this thesis will continue the postmodern expansion of possibilities for reading that their work both reflects and encourages.

Paul and Leggott are two of the more recent among the critics whose writings on Robin Hyde I consider in Chapter 1 of my thesis, 'Robin Hyde and the critical tradition', in which I attempt a comprehensive historicisation of the ways in which Robin Hyde has been read, both by her contemporaries and by those who came later. This chapter is intended as a completion of the partial historicisations which already exist, undertaken by writers whose work I shall discuss, and is also important in introducing the idea of literary subjectivity, a concept which, I contend, goes further than any before in providing a way of understanding the relationship that exists between Robin Hyde's writing and her life, without falling into causality or
determinism. The idea of literary subjectivity works in conjunction throughout my thesis with my threefold reading model of text, context and subtext to provide a methodological and indeed epistemological model which, while not politically neutral, is, I hope, less volatile than earlier readings and able to be transferred, in future, to other writers.

Having provided an analytical narrative of the critical tradition concerned with Hyde in my first chapter, in Chapter 2, ‘Robin Hyde’s heretical poetics’, I begin my analysis of Hyde’s poetics. This analysis draws on both Hyde’s published poetry and the manuscripts of the University of Auckland Robin Hyde Poetry Archive. In Chapter 2 I am concerned with a critical recovery of Hyde as a writer whose sensibility was religious as well as political, and I shall explore some of the key religious thematic of the poetry of her early and middle career, which, I argue, may best be viewed as heretical in outlook. In Chapter 3, ‘Robin Hyde and Le Morte Darthur’ I turn to the question of desire in Hyde’s writing, and explore through a comparative reading of selective texts the way in which the writings of Thomas Malory provide for Hyde an original structure of desire, through which she can articulate her unique position as a literary subject. Acknowledging that most of Hyde’s Malorian poems come from the middle period of her writing career, I consider in Chapter 4, ‘The late poetics of Robin Hyde’, what is usually thought of as the shift to a New Zealand poetics in Hyde’s later poetry. Following other critics who have found the notion of this shift problematic, I argue that it is important to observe other changes in Hyde’s poetry at this
time, specifically the demonstrable influence of the translations from the Chinese by Arthur Waley.

Chapter 5, 'Accepting Summer: Robin Hyde in China', considers the ways in which the key concerns of Hyde's poetry are expanded to the point of resolution in her last writings. Here, I am not only concerned with Hyde's late poems but, importantly, with her final prose volume, *Dragon Rampant*. This volume of non-fiction, an account of Hyde's experiences in China in 1938 is, I shall argue, the finest example of Hyde's literary project, both in its ideas and its execution. Thus, though I begin with poetry, I end with prose. This is a deliberate strategy, setting, I hope, an example for the way in which Robin Hyde's writing can best be read. In my conclusion I shall offer some models for future reading, anticipating the completion of the Marsden-funded projects and the increasing accessibility and availability of the writings of Robin Hyde to an interested, politicised reading public.
1 Hyde, Dragon Rampant, p.270.

2 These theses were by Ash at Otago, Thomas at Canterbury and Paul at Auckland; I will discuss their content in more detail in Chapter 1.

3 In Chapter 1 I shall provide examples of this specific to Robin Hyde. More general examples of these qualities, in both primary and secondary form, can be found in either the Oxford or Penguin Histories of New Zealand Literature, the introductions to both the Penguin Books of New Zealand Verse and the more recent Oxford Anthology of New Zealand Poetry, or any number of Tomorrow, Landfall, Islands, And, The New Zealand Listener or Metro.
‘How shall we construct her here?’: Robin Hyde and the critical tradition

[...] this most bewildering and most versatile of New Zealand writers. (McCormick, 175)

Out of my golden aviary
Shall cry my burning birds.
( Hynde, ‘Written in Cold’, 15-16)

This first chapter of my thesis is a summary and interrogation of the principal critical writings on Robin Hynde since her death. Following the example of the critics who have in the last fifteen years attempted to provide such a historicisation on a more restricted scale, I shall be focussing my interrogation on the compounding significance of the existing critical writings on Robin Hynde, and analysing the ways in which they may be understood to form a tradition out of which writing about Robin Hynde now occurs. In my discussion of this material, I shall ask of each text four questions: What is the context of this text’s production?; What thesis does the writer argue?; How does the writer’s position differ from those before him or her? and, What are the strengths and weaknesses of the writer’s position? By this analytical method I intend to provide a clear illustration of my concept of the Hydian tradition. From this I shall proceed in Chapter 2 to the first of my own analyses of the textual and cultural dynamics of Hynde’s writing.

‘The whence our speech flows on in separate streams’: early Robin Hynde criticism.  

The first articles written on Hynde and her writing after her death in London on
23 August 1939 were, naturally enough, obituaries. These appeared in the major New Zealand newspapers in both islands; the most notable were by Hyde's friend and correspondent John A. Lee, her early mentor and one-time employer J. H. E. Schroder, and Alan Mulgan, who as deputy editor of the *Auckland Star* had published and reviewed Hyde's fiction and poetry. Each writer regretted the death of a young woman who could be an exciting, if erratic, companion, and who had enjoyed literary success, if not fame, at home and, to a lesser extent, abroad. Lee later wrote privately that he regretted not being able to have the London coroner's ruling of suicide overturned, or at least suppressed. But in the public forum of the *Evening Post*, his tone was more circumspect: 'Iris Wilkinson is dead' (26 August, 1939).

The year following Hyde's death was the centenary of the signing of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*, and her writing was included in the survey prepared by the cultural critic E. H. McCormick who was actively involved in the centennial commemorations. His volume, published by the Department of Internal Affairs in 1940, bore the confident title of *Letters and Art in New Zealand* and was the first explicit and complete survey of this kind in New Zealand. McCormick had studied at Cambridge University in the 1930s and was friendly with the British academics F. R. and Q. D. Leavis; his 1940 survey was a revision of a 1935 thesis on New Zealand literature he had written at F. R. Leavis's suggestion, while this thesis was itself a revision and expansion of a master's thesis McCormick had produced on the same topic at Victoria University College in 1929. Despite these beginnings, which were
distant in both time and space, McCormick’s 1940 volume ‘helped the image of the 1930s as a revolutionary decade to crystallize itself in the post-war period’ (Murray, 27).4

The Janus-like narratives of Hyde’s writing, in which historical and contemporary subjects and perspectives inform each other, seem less than revolutionary to McCormick, whose attitude to Hyde’s work is too guarded to be positive. Hyde’s multiple experimentations with perspective, voice, narrative and vocabulary necessarily puzzle and even irritate McCormick as a cultural commentator. His point of view is exemplary of the cultural concerns of the centennial, which were most definitely not focussed on society’s lost ones, Maori or Pakeha, whom Hyde had memorably valorized as ‘The Sparrows When They Fall’ in *The Godwits Fly* (Chapter 15, 168-179), nor even with the war in Europe. Rather, McCormick seems to proceed by asking the questions ‘how does this writer nationalise?’, or ‘how is this writer rational and modern?’. How does Hyde nationalise? asks McCormick. The answer is, not very well:

It is a measure of Robin Hyde’s daring and of her complexity that she, the frail poet of *The Desolate Star*, should have attempted to set on record the fantastic career of ‘Killer’ Stark. The contrast between the poet and the author of *Passport to Hell* is, however, only one that is met with in this most bewildering and most versatile of New Zealand writers. (174-5)

Her power to evoke scenes and incidents of which she could have had no direct experience was prodigious, though sometimes the self-imposed restrictions became irksome and she fell back on reporting or introduced some highly intelligent commentator of a poetic cast of mind, like Sister Collins who wanders rather improbably through *Nor the Years Condemn*. (176)
Check to Your King is Robin Hyde’s most satisfying book, mainly because fantasy had here a solid basis in fact, and imagination was curbed by the discipline of historical research. (176)

[... ] Eileen Duggan and Robin Hyde (as poet) [...] are associated with the more conservative group of writers. Eileen Duggan tentatively handles themes drawn from the daily life of farms and sawmills, while there is a note of poignant anxiety in what she has written under the oppressive shadow of war. Robin Hyde’s Persephone in Winter (1937), as compared with her two earlier collections, shows similar preoccupations. She is still the maker of diaphanous embroideries woven chiefly from nature and literature, but to these highly allusive poems are added pungent social epigrams, a poem on the Abyssinian war, and one in which her fancy plays on

‘grey slum cottages, chipped bowls
Of life set out for starveling’s crust and sup.’ (193)

McCormick’s critical perspective, as Murray has shown, both reflected and consolidated the dominant ideas in the literary culture about what New Zealand writing could and should be. The work which Hyde had done was indeed ‘bewildering’ to the writers whose point of view Curnow summed up in 1999: ‘It always seemed to me that I was against inferior poetry, and looked to good poetry to show the country what it was. [...] I suppose I must expect ideas which were once part of my stock to re-emerge in one or another doctored form, with some fashionably post-colonial spin on them’ (27 March 1999, 7). As later critics have elucidated, and as I shall show in the later chapters of this thesis, Hyde’s poetic truck with such literary nation-building was slight indeed.

The complex politics and protracted gestation of the literary and
cultural nation-building of the 1940s have been discussed thoroughly elsewhere. It is enough to note here that critical interest in Hyde declined significantly in the 1940s, while her contemporaries’ stars continued to rise (most significantly those of Curnow and Sargeson, who presided as respective editors over two 1945 collections, one of New Zealand poetry and one of short stories). As Murray notes, ‘[h]er suicide in 1939 marks Hyde as exclusively a 1930s writer’, earlier asserting that Hyde’s conception of New Zealand appears so at odds with many of the male writers of the decade that the criticism of the period often ignores her altogether or attempts to renegotiate her work within a paradigm fundamentally designed on the normative qualities of a local social realism. (167)

McCormick’s mixed feelings about Hyde’s writing thus became, over time, emblematic of later critical opinions of the decade:

Now she was a writer of fantasy, now a chronicler of life at its rawest; one book was written in the flashy jargon of cheap journalism, the next maintained a good workmanlike level with only occasional lapses into poetic prose or glib reportage. (175)

McCormick’s critical view of Hyde is thus of its time and useful today as an example of how Hyde’s writing was understood in the 1940s. His assessments of her work are, for a present-day reader, partial and limited and serve only to provide a point on the critical map, a distant place of origin. Yet Hyde’s writing retained its champions during the 1940s, and it is their painstaking work which preserved the legacy of Hyde’s poems, letters and personal writings, as well as her prose, for the future. After Robin Hyde’s death in London, the papers she had with her
were eventually returned to her mother in Wellington, a process which Leggott summarises thus:

\[\ldots \text{I}n \text{ May } 1945 \ldots \] Iris Wilkinson’s literary papers arrived in Auckland. Hyde’s mother, Nelly Wilkinson, was one of two literary executors (the other was her old school-friend Gwen Mitcalfe) and when Mr and Mrs Wilkinson died in 1944, Hyde’s older sister Hazel offered the papers for safe-keeping to W.R. Edge. He in turn put them in the hands of Rosalie and Gloria Rawlinson, in whose home he lived, and the three friends of Hyde were all involved in the subsequent sorting of manuscripts. It was Gloria, however, who undertook the editing of a substantial volume of poems. (1999, ix)

A fuller account of the manuscripts’ tortuous progress is provided by Derek Challis in a later article; of the Rawlinsons’ eventual taking-on of the manuscripts Challis notes, describing himself in the third person, that ‘[i]t is surprising that neither Derek nor the surviving Literary Executor, Gwen Mitcalfe, were consulted about the publication of this volume, and it is clear that the de facto literary executorship had effectively passed into the Rawlinsons’ hands’ (JNZL, 29). Hyde had been a champion of Gloria Rawlinson’s poetry (she wrote an introduction to Rawlinson’s 1933 volume, The Perfume Vendor), as well as a friend of Gloria’s mother Rosalie, and seems to have revealed more about her last ontological crisis in letters to the Rawlinsons than to any other of her correspondents. These letters (though primarily addressed to Rosalie), along with other fragments and manuscripts of Hyde’s in the Rawlinsons’ possession, became the source of much of Gloria’s critical and biographical writing on Hyde.?

By 1947 Gloria Rawlinson had submitted to Caxton Press in
Christchurch a selection, mostly unpublished, of Robin Hyde’s poems, and an introduction to the material. These were difficult cultural times in which to present the work of a writer who was no longer of the historical moment; the poetic and prose anthologies of Curnow and Sargeson now dominated the editorial landscape and the literary community’s attention was turning to a new star, James K. Baxter, a young writer whose first volume of poems had been published by Caxton in 1944. Rawlinson, now twenty-nine, was no longer a child prodigy, and her project held no appeal for Caxton’s publisher Denis Glover, whose quip, ‘Let the dead look after the dead’ (to Schroder, 15 November 1949), expresses nastily Rawlinson’s and Hyde’s current standing in the world of literary publishing. The volume, *Houses by the Sea and the Later Poems of Robin Hyde*, did not appear until 1952, by which time Glover had left Caxton and Rawlinson’s hopes for prompt publication, followed by a second volume of longer material, were exhausted.

Rawlinson received support in her enterprise from J. H. E. Schroder, whom Leggott describes as Rawlinson’s ‘editorial consultant and publication advocate’ (1999, ix). While Rawlinson was still a child during the early years of her friendship with Hyde, Schroder was eleven years Hyde’s senior and had acted as her literary mentor during the late 1920s. He was also one of Hyde’s most regular correspondents, and one of the first people to treat her letters to him as a collection of historical and literary importance, later allowing Rawlinson to transcribe them as part of her research for a proposed biography of Hyde, and eventually gifting them to the Alexander Turnbull Library.
Library. In seeking his support, Rawlinson was aligning her editorial project with a member of the literary ‘old guard’, a loosely-connected group of journalists who were at this time retiring or moving on to new projects; Schroder had in the late 1940s left journalism in Christchurch to become deputy director of broadcasting in Wellington. He later minimised his role as Rawlinson’s supporter, writing that ‘I had nothing at all to do with Gloria Rawlinson’s introduction to her collection of R.H.’s later poetry. She was in correspondence with me on many questions of fact; & I told her as much as I could [...] But what she wrote was wholly her own, & I never saw it till it appeared in print’ (to Nielsen Wright, 25 September 1961); but even his partial advocacy was important. No-one else was interested.

Rawlinson’s volume of Hyde’s material offered in its introduction a new model for discussing writers and presented Hyde the poet very differently from how she had previously been interpreted. Rawlinson’s description of Hyde’s personality and behaviour appears to be drawn from a mixture of Rawlinson’s own memories, the memories of others, and those of Hyde’s autobiographical manuscripts which were in the possession of Rawlinson and her mother. Although Rawlinson’s biographical notes about Hyde may now seem coy, they were the first commitment to print, aside from obituaries, of any details about Hyde’s sensibility: her unlimited imagination, her compassionate nature and her volatile temperament. They give present-day readers the valuable perspective of an empathetic eye-witness:

There was at this time [1937] an air of pathos about her and she clutched at friendship in a despairing manner. Sometimes her fine
heavily-lashed blue eyes were down and done for, sometimes they had a large ghostly shine. Yet she could be a gay and witty companion, interested in world affairs and in a somewhat shy and hesitant manner always ready to give, listen to, and discuss solutions for the world’s problems. [...] She had been through troubled waters, the depths of which cannot be sounded in this outline of her literary life. She was haunted by doubts and suspicions, often unfounded, but once having gained her confidence and affection you held them forever and however bitterly she complained of her friends one to the other these friendships endured. (18-19)

A sensitive but troubled person, a loyal and passionate friend—Hyde is neither the first nor the last writer to be described in these terms. That to do so was a critical gesture of rebellion, an apparently reactionary move, says much about the constrained nature of New Zealand literary culture at the time Rawlinson’s volume appeared. Glover’s hostility to it seems to have centred around the introduction; as early as 1948 he wrote to Schroder that although ‘[t]he extracts from RH’s letters arouse all my old horror of she-poets, and of RH herself […] the poems, many of them, are another matter. […] These poems are a considerable achievement’ (17 November 1948). Curnow likewise continued to attack Hyde’s centrifugal stylistics in his Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse, although he later attempted to minimise the force of his opinion by arguing that even though ‘[i]n my 1960 Penguin anthology, “hysteria” and “exhibitionistic” did occur […] that’s in a different context and perspective, where the words characterise her earlier poetry, (not her personality) in contrast to the late poems which I admire’ (27 March 1999, 7-8).

Rawlinson’s introduction valorises Hyde in two other important
ways. The first is through the means that Glover so detested: by quotations both from the letters Hyde wrote to family and friends while in China and, later, London and southern England, and from other manuscript material. This subjective selection presents Hyde's decline as steady and inexorable, supporting the private view that Rawlinson had expressed in a letter to Schroder in 1948: 'Have been thinking about the Press and Iris's suicide. John, she would have done it in any case sooner or later—she was just made that way [...]—there were far more serious factors than poor reviews or lack of them in the N.Z. Press' (27 January 1948). Thus, Rawlinson's selection shows the politicised thought and personal courage of Hyde's journey into China eventually subsumed by the ontological anguish of her last days in London. From occupied Hsuchowfu, Hyde wrote:

> In the hospital wards I am really of little use [...] I helped to wash hundreds of wounds, and I think that some of the women and children who were not too badly bombed to notice anything, were pleased when I helped. They caught hold of my hands and tried earnestly to talk to me, but all I could say was, 'I can't speak Chinese. I feel bad for you. Your pain is my sorrow. Good morning. All right.' These Chinese phrases, so heavy and slow, I kept repeating. (24 May 1938, *HBTS* 26-7)

Another paragraph, written shortly after Hyde's arrival in England in September 1938, shows the imprint of her China experience on her consciousness:

> Walk on the wine-red leaf-mould of an English forest [...] and suddenly I find myself measuring my steps to fit exactly the sleepers on the Lunghai railway line. It is dark within daylight; no beech or hornbeams broach their kegs of shadow over the sodden leaves. Instead comes a low white-flowering Chinese acacia, its marching lines broken by dusty willows ... then a horn-beam
straight ahead splits into two. From the joined mossy base its two trunks wreathe like lovers ... and I know, that is nothing of China's. And I say to myself 'Steady as you go lass, you are in England now.' (n.d. [September 1938], *HBTS* 30)

The imaginative power and pathos of these extracts cannot be denied. They show Hyde as a writer in the fullest sense of the word, someone who believed in the material of her own imagination and lived as what another writer has called a 'self-created self'.¹¹ They invest the sad facts of Hyde's decline and death with an existential drama that its physical circumstances lack, as Rawlinson herself notes: 'It is obvious from her letters that she had not recovered from the exhausting tropical ailment, sprue, convalescence from which is prolonged and marked by attacks of severe depression' (33). But, most importantly, these extracts draw the reader's attention to the way in which Hyde's life and writing are so enmeshed that to discuss one is necessarily to discuss the other, as I have already asserted. Rawlinson's material is the first presentation of Hyde's literary subjectivity, a life lived according to principles formed by reading and writing, and writing created by the principles of that life. Rawlinson's introduction also presents for her readers a reading of Hyde based on privilege and proximity; her selections from a private correspondence place herself, as critic, in dialectic with Hyde's life. A similar model of reading can be found in the archived collection of Hyde's letters to Schroder, many of which are marked with Schroder's own marginalia, reflecting his interest in Hyde's poetics.

There is a tension inherent in this dialectical model: while much of
Hyde’s correspondence remained in private collections, access to critical material such as that used by Rawlinson remained restricted to those with personal connections to the correspondence’s owners. This in itself is not unusual, but as long as the reader’s attention remained drawn to Hyde’s virtuosity as a correspondent, thus highlighting the importance of her private writings to understanding her oeuvre, while the writings themselves remained inaccessible, a critical and conceptual gap existed, which was filled instead by gossip and speculation. This gap was prolonged into the 1960s by delays in producing Rawlinson’s other critical project, a biography of Robin Hyde, assisted by Hyde’s son Derek Challis. During this time Rawlinson refused other critics access to the private writings of Hyde in her possession. As work on the biography continued into the 1970s and subsequently stalled, Rawlinson’s protectiveness towards her material created a hierarchy of critical access that could only be breached by stealth, and which persists in altered forms to the present day, as I shall discuss. But in 1952 her achievement was more compact: she had opened up an holistic means of reading Hyde which others followed at least in part, as we shall see.

The second important valorisation of Hyde by Rawlinson was her construction of a critical model for reading Hyde’s poetry which was reflective of the post-war cultural times, and which both validated Rawlinson’s defence of Hyde’s writing and made the poems selected for the volume seem more important than much of Hyde’s earlier poetry. Of Hyde’s first poetical volume *The Desolate Star* (1929), Rawlinson argues that ‘[t]hough the poems
in this first book bear the imprint of her early Romantic reading they show a
gift for musical phrase and rhythm' (13), while she notes that 'the dominant
theme' in Hyde's second book of poetry, The Conquerors (1935), is
'compassion and the search for a visionary country [...]’ (15). Rawlinson
also remarks that 'the fine sensitive withdrawn quality of the poetry' in The
Conquerors was 'commented on by many critics' (15). This faint praise is
strategic, as it allows Rawlinson to suggest a model of development which
moves towards Hyde's third volume Persephone in Winter (1937) and
culminates, by implication, in Houses by the Sea. The development Rawlinson
notes is Hyde's gradual move towards motifs and themes concerned not with
the world of the literary imagination, but with the landscape and lore of New
Zealand, which, in the critical climate Rawlinson was writing in, could be read,
unequivocally, as a good thing. Rawlinson's account of this change in
Hyde's focus is subtle, plotting an apparently organic trajectory from reading,
to research, to the land and its people:

[Persephone in Winter] represents an interesting stage in
Robin Hyde's development as a poet, and for reasons other than
surer grasp of technique, subtle change in depth and meaning or
variety of subjects. Themes from English history, Shakespeare,
Malory and the Bible still predominate and in Le Mort d'Arthur
especially she found symbols of that visionary country she had
long sought under so many names—Nirvana, Sarras, Camelot,
Ultima Thule. Much of the verse in Persephone in Winter
belongs to this phase but there is a change reflected in perhaps six
or seven poems. The publishers had returned the ms.[sic] asking
that a reselection be made to reduce the size of the book. This
was done but new poems were added to the revised selection and
one interesting point is that they all had New Zealand themes.
Paraha, Red Berries, A Song of Mokoia, and Sheepfolds were
among these, and the book was again sent away in January 1937.
In September of the previous year Robin Hyde had gone to Dunedin at the suggestion of the late Mr Downie Stewart who thought she would find valuable material for her work in the Hocken Library. Here she filled two large exercise books with notes including long extracts from Edward Markham’s journal, ‘New Zealand—or Recollections of it.’ In 1820 Markham, an Englishman, wrote this frank record of his ten months stay among the Maoris of the Hokianga River and from this journal she drew material for Arangi-Ma and made of the author and his Maori wife a poetical study in the complexities of two ways of life. Young Knowledge was also written at this time and it would seem that Heaphy’s discovery of the Greenstone People was akin to the ‘young knowledge’ that she as a poet was acquiring.

Letters from Dunedin reflected the direction her poetic imagination was taking: ‘... as to poetry—right now I want to change from one vein to another—its [sic] just dawned on me that I’m a New Zealander, and surely, surely the legends of the mountains, rivers and people that we see about us should mean more to us than the legends of any country on earth.’ [...] Her desperate groping for background which had started with Check To Your King had now invaded her poetry and she could write with sudden conviction:

O red berries, red berries,
Surprise in the wilderness,
Coral on dark green dress.
Nay, don’t tell me she’s blank
My own land—she makes things....

The Arthurian knights and historical heroes, even the dream worlds and enchanted islands almost disappear. (16-17)

These paragraphs are the central critical core of Rawlinson’s thesis. They reveal one writer accounting for an earlier one in terms of a later time, and are an emphatic rejection of earlier criticism of Hyde’s poetry by her contemporaries—Sargeson, for example, had written to Glover that ‘I’ve told Iris bluntly that being hysterical on paper isn’t writing’ (n.d., Murray 166). Here, Rawlinson rehabilitates Hyde as someone who left behind her initial,
outdated poetic preferences and moved on to a poetics that was as connected
with land and people as the times dictated a good poetics should be. It is as if
Rawlinson is speaking to McCormick’s view of Hyde’s literary limitations,
invalidating them by means of her reconstruction of Hyde’s poetic sea­
change. It is difficult to overstate how effective a tactic this was.

From being a writer thirteen years dead, an unfortunately
reactionary voice in a decade which was now thought to be about the
uncovering of the modern and the invention of a national stylistics, Hyde
became a late addition to the story of writing and culture articulated in the
1940s by McCormick, Holcroft, Curnow and Sargeson. She now existed as a
sort of lesser Mansfield, echoes of whose Burnell family stories could be
heard in Hyde’s own poetic story of a Wellington childhood, ‘Houses by the
Sea’. Rawlinson’s introduction and poetical selection made it acceptable to
talk seriously about Hyde again, and, as one critic has suggested, introduced
into the literary culture a stylistics which was important in Rawlinson’s own
writing: ‘Rawlinson’s shrewd selection of Hyde’s unpublished poetry
suggests that she knew [...] what she was looking for. Certainly there is a
similarity between the Hyde she “creates” by selection in Houses by the Sea
and the persona in the volume she herself was putting together at the time, The
Islands Where I Was Born (1955)’ (Evans, 114). The responses to
Rawlinson’s volume were immediate enough, given the five years she had
waited for publication. The most important of these responses allowed
another friend of Hyde’s to construct his own version of the deceased writer,
and it gives us as readers a sense of how Rawlinson’s work impacted on an individual perspective much closer to McCormick’s in its aesthetic. The response was ‘Robin Hyde: A Reassessment’ and its writer was James Bertram.

James Bertram was a New Zealand-born scholar and orientalist who by the 1950s had returned to his home country from south-east Asia (where he had spent time as a political writer and later a prisoner of war), and was now teaching English literature at Victoria University of Wellington. He and Robin Hyde had become friends during her journey into China (she travelled with him to Macau, where they met William Empson and other British expatriates) and he had later assisted her in London not only with her China writings, but also with finding hospital and civilian accommodation. In April 1939 he returned to China. Hyde’s farewell letter to Bertram shows her strength of feeling for him, while a script Bertram wrote for a 1985 radio talk on Hyde reveals a similarly warm, complex range of emotions about someone whose memory still loomed large after nearly fifty years. From the Hospital for Tropical Diseases in London, Hyde wrote to Bertram that she was:

[…] just think[ing] about you—my very good friend.

I’m not sentimental over you, or only in the vague general way that would apply to almost anyone else—But in another way, which hasn’t any concern with sentiment, I do like you so much—yes, and love you so much. Partly gratitude, but that’s not all: one can detest the people to whom one owes the motions of gratitude. I think why you’ll always be Jim Bertram […] is because you are so human: and not a snob, and not a fool. (13 April 1939)

while Bertram later asserted that
[w]hen I recall that thrusting indomitable figure, with a stick in one hand and a portable typewriter in the other, limping into the front line of a particularly nasty war [...] then this is for me no figure of despair or defeat, but a true flag-bearer of the human cause. Iris was writing not just for China, but for the oppressed and afflicted everywhere. (17)

Bertram’s 1953 article on Hyde, published in *Landfall*, is historically important because it shows us the confusion that Rawlinson’s sympathetic account of Hyde’s poetics created for high cultural nationalists. Throughout Bertram’s text, the tension between his admiration for Hyde’s personal courage and almost indefatigable spirit, and the critical and aesthetic demands his cultural position makes of him, is both palpable and fascinating. His work reminds us too that, though Rawlinson herself yokes Hyde’s poetical development to a cultural nationalist reading model, there remains an essential incompatibility between Hyde’s expansive, questing literary subjectivity and the dominant literary discourse of the 1950s, which infuses not only Bertram’s argument but his subtext too, with a puritanism that dare not speak its name.

Bertram’s ‘Reassessment’, ostensibly a review of *Houses by the Sea*, is in reality an extended literary meditation that considers, obliquely and with much obfuscation, the way the literary culture might now view Hyde in light of Rawlinson’s volume. Bertram is interested in both Hyde’s late poems and the details of her inner life: her motivations and her concerns. To an extent, Bertram takes his lead from Rawlinson in providing his own ‘inside information’ about Hyde’s life and work. But, unlike Rawlinson, he does not
write from the edge of the literary culture, and his reading of Hyde is constantly undermined by a sub-textual gap between his personal opinion and the cultural context—academic cultural nationalism—from which he writes. Even though he departs a little from received opinion in endorsing some of Hyde's poems, Bertram's commentary is elliptical and pompous. Ultimately, his text functions as neither analysis nor review, but rather as a convoluted index to the difficulty of accounting for Hyde in terms of the dominant literary culture.

Bertram attempts to frame his argument in the rhetoric of cultural commentary. The juxtaposition implied here is familiar: New Zealand read in the light of European culture:

Who are the proper guardians of literary reputations? In France, where these matters are still thought to be important, a recent doctoral thesis on *The Myth of Rimbaud* caused some stir both inside and outside the Sorbonne […]

[W]here the poet in his own lifetime has begun to live his own myth (as Rimbaud so conspicuously had done) the appeal to the text has no easy finality. We are thrown back, again and again, on the unique individual behind the work […]

The nature of New Zealand society, with its profound distrust of the artist in any field but war and sport, and its instinctive dislike of the abnormal, has not in the past encouraged frankness in this regard. Most New Zealand writers […] have rebelled against their own environment, and made a more or less emphatic protest in their lives or in their own work […]

The result of this state of things is familiar. Katherine Mansfield […] is sentimentalized into a charming writer of stories about children: the 'unpleasant' facts of her life, the significance of her lonely voyage as an artist, are largely ignored. John Mulgan's tribute to the New Zealand division overseas is quoted with approval; the implications of *Man Alone* dismissed as a hangover from the depression years. (181)
There are some indications here of what Bertram is trying to do; he seems to suggest that the reader take his article as an attempt to find Hyde as 'the unique individual behind the work'. Bertram's apparently general opening monologue can be read as a kind of assembling of Hyde herself, out of a series of images of other writers: Rimbaud, Mansfield and Mulgan, with all the cultural criss-crossing this trio implies, incorporating also the bleaker circumstances of their lives: Rimbaud's self-mythologising, Mansfield's struggle for identity, and Mulgan's early death by suicide. But when he confronts the figure of Hyde herself, Bertram cannot commit to his own judgements. 'At first sight,' he demurs, 'the pattern [of her life] seems familiar enough [...] a rather embarrassing record of dangerous living and over-stretched ambition' (182).

It appears that Bertram is 'embarrass[ed]' by Hyde on behalf of his cultural contemporaries. In asserting that 'none of the books published by Robin Hyde in her lifetime was quite first-rate' (182) he concurs with McCormick's earlier conclusions, and follows a similar pattern of lukewarm praise and brotherly admonishment in his summary of Hyde's prose volumes. Bertram's praise of Check to Your King (a novel which McCormick also liked\textsuperscript{4}), which he calls 'a gay and sparkling book, written with unflagging zest throughout' (182), is undercut by his pedantic claim that the volume is a 'tour de force, rather than pure creation' (182). Where Bertram disputes McCormick, as in his rejection of the latter's verdict on Wednesday's Children ('fantasy without ballast and [...] a disaster'
[McCormick 176]), he does it with similar obfuscation, equal parts defence and condemnation: 'Certainly it is an unsatisfactory book [...] But though the tone is uncertain throughout [...] [t]he figure of Wednesday herself is hauntingly familiar' (183).

Although Bertram had, as I have shown, a personal connection to Hyde, because he does not declare it in his article—as Rawlinson does by her use of Hyde’s correspondence—he is unable in his text to provide any kind of committed reading of her, and the model he presents is thus too fractured to be transferable. The unresolvable tensions between the personal and the cultural in Bertram’s argument mean that he cannot achieve the synthesis of life and works which produces an interpretable literary subjectivity. While Rawlinson makes her closeness to Hyde the starting point of her analysis, a ‘given’ that is the point of departure for the reader, Bertram makes an effort to write out any such relationship with the dead writer, and is left through this repression unable to move beyond the memory of a woman whom he saw as damaged, a view which obsesses him textually. His early reference to ‘[t]he early illness and resulting lameness, emphasizing difference from the community already treasured for its own sake’ (182) sets the tone for his ‘reassessment’ of her prose writing. His analysis posits a crudely direct causality between Hyde’s life and her novels:

Robin Hyde enjoyed writing about Starkie, and no doubt projected a good deal of her own feelings and frustration into this Antipodean Paul Bunyan. (182)

[Check to Your King] is [...] an astonishing achievement, when the circumstances of its writing are recalled. (182)
[Wednesday's Children] has an obvious relevance to Robin Hyde's own predicament and her own private revolt. (183)

[Dragon Rampant] was written against time by a sick woman who had just emerged from an experience that would have prostrated more robust and experienced travellers. It is fragmentary and chaotic, and not very easy to follow: but it is a very brave book [...] (183)

Nothing that Bertram says here is untrue or even, on its own, inappropriate to textual analysis. What makes his reading 'stuck', unable to proceed to any kind of transferable model, is his repeated return to a vague evocation of Robin Hyde's emotional problems and physical difficulties. His article is a continuous special plea for a more sympathetic reading of Hyde's work, on the grounds that 'she had lived her own myth [...] authentic and not dreamt up out of books' (183) and that 'no New Zealand writer has faced greater handicaps' (191). This contrasts with Rawlinson's rather more sensitive premise that an understanding of Hyde's intellect and imagination gives the reader a better chance of appreciating her poetry. Although it was not Bertram's intention to compromise his own sincerity, this is the effect of his text. It reads in this regard like a late addition to what Murray has called 'a [1930s] criticism that frequently sought to foreground the issue of [Hyde's] gender or of her body in some way' (168), an appendix to McCormick, only more plangent.16

As Murray has argued, Bertram's article reflects the second of the dominant discourse's two critical 'standpoints' towards Hyde: 'patronizing scorn on the one hand, a limiting acceptance on the other' (168). In edging
towards this second standpoint, Bertram distances himself from some of his contemporaries, but remains close to the cultural centre through his overall ambivalence about the literary merit of Hyde’s writing. His warm assertion that ‘the tone’ of the sequence ‘Houses by the Sea’ is ‘Robin Hyde’s own achievement’ (188), is compromised somewhat by his earlier suggestion that the sequence is under the influence of ‘Yeats—the later Yeats—and Auden’ (188), and his assertion that ‘the impulse behind the poem must have been very like the impulse that produced [Mansfield’s] “At the Bay”’ (187). Overall, he argues, the sequence is Hyde’s ‘tribute to her parents and to her own youth: it crystallizes a good deal of strong and mature feeling’ (188), but this is again offset by the contention that ‘though there are occasional lapses, and weak lines that further revision might have cleared up, the sequence as a whole undoubtedly succeeds in what it sets out to do’ (188).

Even in reviewing what has been almost universally regarded as a fine and moving sequence of poems, Bertram remains bound to his reading of Hyde and her writing as a fusion of elements strong and weak, a reading which seems unsettlingly tied up with Bertram’s memory of Hyde’s body and psyche. When Bertram asserts that ‘Houses by the Sea’ ‘seems to me a major contribution to our poetry’ (189), it is because it holds for him the textual memory of his friend before she was physically and mentally damaged: ‘And it closely engages our sympathy for the young girl—not lame, not worn in mind and body—who runs through it down hills towards the sea’ (189).17
Bertram begins his article with lofty socio-cultural analysis; he ends with the hard, concrete reality of Robin Hyde’s suicide. The possibility that her death was an accident, that she intended only to attempt suicide, seems to be the private grief around which at least part of his argument revolves: ‘[...] the tragic manner of her death—baldly announced in the cable-news at the time—is capable of many different interpretations, if it is known that there had been earlier and deliberately theatrical attempts at suicide’ (185). This focus is understandable from our readerly distance; there is an unhappy fragmentation of tone and focus between Hyde’s last letter to Bertram, on his departure for China, and her final letter to Rawlinson:

Some day very possibly I’ll meet you—in a Chinese town, a New Zealand town, or as a writer and an idea ‘in the minds of men.’ Then it’ll be rather fun. Meanwhile, I’m keeping your attic window as a sort of mind-picture, and whenever I like I’ll make the light go up again. (to Bertram, 13 April 1939)

Yes, yes, that is how it was and could not be otherwise—but uncertainty and the needs of body and mind for re-affirmation spend so much time trying to kill it ... but a little above the margin we are lonely. (to Rawlinson, 21 August 1939)

Bertram’s cultural loyalties are more divisive than Rawlinson’s; his university position and his longtime friendship with Charles Brasch, editor of *Landfall* (who had also helped and hosted Hyde in England, with even less success than Bertram), are sufficient data from both the public and private spheres of literary production to place him closer to the cold heart of the orthodoxy than Rawlinson ever was, or would be. The psychic remnants of Hyde as Bertram’s damaged friend disappear under the pressure of the
dominant cultural discourse, whose aestheticised, gendered boundaries mean that Bertram’s article ends not with a critical conclusion, but with a chain of ‘if’s. He will not, it seems, be joining Rawlinson at the periphery, where Hyde’s literary subjectivity flourishes. Though Bertram later wrote that Hyde’s ‘faith and her love looked out of her eyes and that spirit lives on in her words’ (1985, 17), he remains in the 1950s on the side of the critical establishment:

If we must regard her life as tragic and divided—an alternation of grey shadows and frenetic, ill-calculated bursts of physical activity—and if we must judge her literary output as imperfect, marred by attitudinizing, and too often shrill, we have merely recognized the obvious, and noted in her certain limitations that were exaggerated—if they were not largely imposed—by the colonial dilemma. Her achievement remains astonishing, for no New Zealand writer has faced greater handicaps. ‘In the midst of the important affairs of State’, said the High Commissioner at her graveside, without conscious irony, ‘we must make time to bury our young poet.’ This, one is tempted to suggest, is about all that New Zealand found time to do for her—until one remembers the generous literary friendships, the patient hospital care, and the persistent faith in her writing that has produced this last volume. A literary pension and material security would hardly have assuaged her daimon [sic]. Robin Hyde had to live precariously, she had to make her own way and live independently by her own writing. She did it; and whether at the end she lost heart, or merely miscalculated in a gesture, she had already, with characteristic flamboyancy, written her own epitaph:

Maker of words, kicked from the door of words,
I shall be bound to the wheel of words, and die. (191)

What happened next? Bertram appears to have said all he had to say in one go; he did not publish again on Hyde. However, his work, together with McCormick’s consideration of Hyde in the centennial survey, was to
become, by the 1980s, the point of departure for a critical attitude that was both antagonistic to, and deeply engaged with, the writing and criticism of the cultural nationalists. The critical point of view was literary feminism, and an analysis of its origins, development and key figures in relation to Robin Hyde criticism forms much of the remainder of this chapter.

Hyde's chief female advocate, Gloria Rawlinson, eventually stood outside the feminist writings on Robin Hyde that emerged after the 1970s, but her contribution to the Robin Hyde critical tradition was an important precedent for their critical method of archival quotation. A more direct line begat by Rawlinson's critical work on Hyde was continued through the editorial commentaries of Hyde's son, Derek Challis, in the 1980s. The twinned viewpoints of Rawlinson and Challis were further complemented by a PhD thesis on Hyde by Patrick Sandbrook, which appeared in 1985. But before I consider the work of Rawlinson's successors, it is necessary to examine the distaff line for which McCormick, Bertram and the other cultural nationalists served as antagonists: the cultural and academic movement of feminism which absorbed into its discursive practices first a portion of the literary-historical academy, then Robin Hyde's writing itself. This change did not happen overnight. Rawlinson's criticism and poetry of the 1970s serves as a useful lens to exemplify the transition; her work, as McCormick once said of Hyde's writing, was 'claimed by both the rival groups of New Zealand writers and contributed to the journals of both' (1940, 175).

Rawlinson had continued to publish her own poetry in the 1950s
and 60s as well as working with Challis on her biography of Hyde, and, as Leggott has recently revealed, preparing a second volume of Hyde's poems for publication by Louis Johnson. 18 A critical article by Rawlinson, 'Cloud of Witness IV: Robin Hyde', was published in an Australian periodical *The Wooden Horse* in 1950 and in 1970 Auckland University Press reprinted *The Godwits Fly*, with an introductory essay by Rawlinson. This introduction, which also appeared in subsequent reprints of the volume, retained the analytical position Rawlinson displayed in her introduction to *Houses by the Sea*, but went further than her earlier work by providing an account of the circumstances of Robin Hyde's life, including her children and her suicide, and by referring to manuscript drafts of the novel under discussion. As in 1952, Rawlinson quotes from Hyde's private correspondence and relates the events of Hyde's life to the development of her writing, specifically the novel at hand:

Deeply in love with an ambitious and handsome young man (the prototype of Timothy in *The Godwits Fly*) she planned with him a romantic pilgrimage to England and Europe—a 'godwit’s' journey. A year later these dreams of love and travel were dealt a hard blow when, as a result of a painful infection in the right knee, she became permanently lame. [...] Two years were to pass before she learned of his death a few months after his arrival in England. But her subsequent sense of loss and loneliness, intensified by the unhappy events of those years, no doubt helped to transform the first love into the romantic hero-figure of a personal legend. In *The Godwits Fly* this aspect of the intelligent, restless, charming Timothy is lyrically expressed in the 'barbarian for Caesar' passage on p.181. (viii)

Rawlinson's actual analysis of the novel accounts for it as a mix of autobiography and social and political 'themes':
Disconnectedness must be admitted as a fault in the narrative, arising, obviously, from a failure to solve the perplexities of an autobiographical novel. (xiv)

In the Author's Foreword, while she is chiefly concerned with defining the godwit metaphor, she is also aware that the 'integration of a country from the looseness of a soil' is at hand. Obviously The Godwits Fly and the recent Dunedin poems reflected the new trend.19

But, in fact, it was a more turbulent, more enduring theme that prevailed in the novel: the transition from one era to another as it affected the lives of the Hannays. Robin Hyde belonged to a younger generation of writers who, in the mid-1930s, were able to take a longer view of the twentieth century, and therefore better able to relate its change. (xv)

In this analytical method, Rawlinson reflects the temper of the critical times as they were in 1970; her reading of Hyde's 'themes' echoes, in a rather more positive manner, the consideration Joan Stevens had made of Hyde's writing in her 1960/1965 volume The New Zealand Novel. Designed for adult education classes, Stevens's analysis was an old-fashioned account of theme, character, structure and setting. Despite calling The Godwits Fly 'one of the remarkable novels of its time' (60) she also argued that '[t]here are several themes in the book, not well fused' (59), and that the theme of the pressure of English culture on colonial life was 'not [...] worked out in the terms of the novel, being stated, but not shown in its impact on Eliza's life. This is a major weakness' (59-60). This methodological rhyme between Rawlinson and Stevens was the final note of critical unity before the immense cultural pressure of the 1970s came to bear on literary and historical analysis.

In 1976, a volume called Critical Essays on the New Zealand Novel, edited by Cherry Hankin, was published by Heinemann. Included in
its selection was a further essay on The Godwits Fly by Rawlinson, which expands on her 1970 essay. Once again, Rawlinson makes reference to the long gestation of Hyde’s last-published work of fiction, continuing her critical method of quoting from private sources:

The published version was Robin Hyde’s second attempt at writing The Godwits Fly, and had she not hit upon the manner through which she could organise her characters and events into a coherent story, she would most likely have abandoned the project for years, perhaps altogether. (40)

In accordance with her earlier focus on the conventional signposts of literature, particularly character and theme, Rawlinson notes that ‘the style which [Hyde] had evolved for herself [w]as the only way of moulding a failed attempt into something like a readable novel’ (40), and goes on to argue that Hyde’s initial abandonment of her project reflects that ‘it is just this blend of autobiography and fiction that is so difficult to write. After all the genre is a kind of mule’ (41). Rawlinson relies for this thesis on the concept of a fundamental clash between the structural requirements of a novel and the necessary fidelity to ‘real life’ which ‘[a]utobiography purports to relate’ (41). This then enables Rawlinson to defend the structural fragmentation in the novel’s conclusion, which Bertram had referred to as ‘cobbled up’ (183). ‘[I]t is the vitality of Robin Hyde’s prose-style’, contends Rawlinson, that makes it easier to admit the failure of these last chapters in terms of structure and technique. If The Godwits Fly rises above this failure it is chiefly due to the author’s penetrating stare into the heart of suburban experience, and to her lively appreciation of the New Zealand background. (58)
In Rawlinson's account, Hyde's novel succeeds as a report on experience, in which the protagonist Eliza, like her creator twin, is left at the end of the 1920s 'drifting between present circumstances and an indeterminate future' (57). This autobiographical integrity, Rawlinson asserts, makes up for the collapse of the novel's structural artifice. In this she is consistent with her earlier claim for the novel's merit: 'essential to the truth of any decade', its historical detail and personal witness supports 'the purpose of literature, which, as Robin Hyde once remarked, is “to make all men of all generations and places truly intimate with each other”' (1993 [1970], xv).

How 'all men of all generations and places' might be 'truly intimate with each other' was not the concern of the volume in which Rawlinson's 1976 analysis appears. Its purpose was rather more pragmatic, the presentation of a selection of New Zealand novels thought to be strong enough to stand up to what Hankin calls 'searching scrutiny, based on an implicit assumption of their value' (vii). This in turn was intended to 'direct attention to the novels as well as stimulate further critical evaluation of New Zealand fiction' (vii). Hankin's introduction bears the typical hallmarks of the anxiety of the earlier critical orthodoxy. Could New Zealand writing ever be good enough to read critically, when critics such as Hankin feared the operation of a 'so-called double standard' (viii) in New Zealand criticism, in which 'critical leniency towards New Zealand writing [...] has at times resulted in virtual suspension of judgement' against 'our own literary efforts', which, paradoxically, still end up 'dismissed for their amateurism' (viii)?
Caught in the Möbius Curve of cultural self-belittlement, Hankin can only make the weak assertion that ‘the novels discussed’ in her volume ‘are creditable attempts to come to terms with this country and these people’ (viii).

‘Now I’m away, and done with ye all’: feminist retrieval and the 1980s.20

Yet Hankin’s introduction no longer embodied the only critical or imaginative perspective available to New Zealand readers; indeed, its views were already under interrogation at the time of its publication.21 Another volume in which Rawlinson’s work appeared, published in 1977, is an important example of the literary and cultural sea-change taking place. This volume, Private Gardens: An Anthology of New Zealand Women Poets, was edited by Riemke Ensing and contained poems by a variety of women, several being published for the first time, and among whom Rawlinson was a senior figure, in terms of her public literary life, if not her years.22 Ensing’s introduction makes clear the social and cultural circumstances out of which the volume arises; what is notable here is their almost complete detachment from the concerns of cultural nationalism:

Towards the end of 1974, sparked off with enthusiasm for the concept of INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S YEAR, [sic] and deciding to contribute my share to that event, I began this anthology. At no stage was the collection meant as a token effort. Everyone knew there were competent women poets in the country. International Women’s Year simply provided a convenient time for assembling their work into a book. (10)

Ensing’s anthology is nationalist in its scope, but feminist in its
intent. Its existence reflects the rise of second-wave western feminism in the late 1960s and 70s. By the time of Ensing's anthology, the centrifugal energies of feminism were creating interest in, and enthusiasm for, writing and criticism by women, both in the publishing houses and in the universities of New Zealand. As women's studies faculties were founded and the scope of literary and historical curricula expanded (indeed, effectively doubled), the attention of feminist academics turned not to living writers such as Rawlinson (who was still writing occasional poems into the 1980s)\(^23\), but to those women who hadn't made it to the party, either born out of time or gone to an early grave: Katherine Mansfield, Jane Mander, Jean Devanny, Sylvia Ashton-Warner and, most pertinently, Robin Hyde.\(^24\)

Although critical articles on Hyde constructed according to the cultural nationalist model still occasionally appeared, such as Frank Birbalsingh's 1977 *Landfall* article 'Robin Hyde', their claims no longer held the univocal authority they once might have done. Within less than ten years, both the thesis and the vocabulary of Birbalsingh's essay ('the exuberant fluency of her style redeems her strictures from being merely whining complaints' [363]; '[h]er more repulsive scenes are invariably accompanied by a redeeming sense of pathos which proves that she is herself repelled by them' [371]; 'De Thierry's expectations of life are similar to the author's; and the sad frustration of his well-intentioned schemes parallels the tragic failure of her idealistic faith' [373]), would seem both mistaken and redundant.
The literary feminism which informed Ensing’s anthology and which flowered, in its academic form, in the 1980s had its origins in the 1970s’ movements for women’s liberation which stressed the need for social, political and attitudinal change. Events such as the International Year of the Woman in 1975 as well as more practical, grass-roots networking among women gave rise to a sense of female community and artistic solidarity, which in turn produced various collectives of women writers and artists. It was two Auckland publishing ventures, undertaken almost a decade apart, which were important in determining the shape of Robin Hyde research into the 1980s: the appearance of the feminist bulletin Broadsheet from 1972, and the founding of the New Women’s Press in 1981. The writers and academics who took a feminist interest in Robin Hyde and her writing were active in both these enterprises.

One of the chief originators of the New Women’s Press was Wendy Harrex, who still retains control over the imprint (unused since 1993), and who now works as editor-in-chief at the University of Otago Press. A 1982 article in Broadsheet by Renee Taylor announces the imminent release of the New Women’s Press’s first volume, Healthy Women by Sarah Calvert, and notes that the editors welcomed manuscripts, particularly non-fiction. Although four anthologies entitled New Women’s Fiction were released over the next ten years, the publishers remained true to their original aims when they reprinted Robin Hyde’s final prose volume, Dragon Rampant, in 1984. A reprint of Nor the Years Condemn appeared in 1986, followed by
The crucial difference between these reissues and their first editions was the critical commentaries which variously preceded, or proceeded from, the reprinted texts. These essays, most notably the ‘Commentary’ at the conclusion of *Nor the Years Condemn*, quickly became essential reading for those interested in the life and writing of Robin Hyde. They re-constructed Hyde for a generation of readers who had grown up in the long shadow of cultural nationalism, and, as one critic has suggested, invented her anew. Their critical position was predicated on almost total disagreement with the earlier critical writings on Robin Hyde, which they saw as part of an oppressive patriarchal regime, as we shall see. Sometimes, however, their focus was less feminist-revisionist and more literary, as exemplified in Linda Hardy’s ‘Critical Note’ to the first of the New Women’s Press’s reprints of Hyde’s writing, *Dragon Rampant*.

Hardy’s ‘Critical Note’ followed an introduction by Derek Challis, which details Hyde’s travels through China and her subsequent year in England. While Challis’s work is in the style of Rawlinson, tactfully written and interspersed throughout with quotations from Hyde’s correspondence and journalism, Hardy’s material is rather different. Its provenance is more literary; Hardy is interested both in creating an historical context for *Dragon Rampant* and in analysing Hyde’s writing technique itself. She moves beyond the bewildered dismissals of the volume made by Bertram and others, and uses her readerly confusion at Hyde’s prose as a place from which to probe the nature of Hyde’s project:
It is sometimes difficult to place Hyde’s voice at all; the book is written in the first person, but the perspective is shifting and elusive, like the narrative tense, which moves from the past historic to the present and sometimes beyond tense altogether [....] The syntax is elliptical and unorthodox. Each detail is seemingly as important as another [...] The general effect may be bewildering at first, but we can see that Hyde is trying to give us the scene in all its multiplicity. (xvii)

The difference here between Hardy’s assessment and Bertram’s 1953 opinion that *Dragon Rampant* was ‘fragmentary and chaotic, and not very easy to follow’ (183) is the critical empathy that Hardy feels for Hyde, due to the feminist politicisation that has provided Hardy with both the will and the means to understand the cultural and technical nature of Hyde’s literary project. So strong is Hardy’s empathy for Hyde that she can even sympathise with Bertram’s assertion, noting that

> it does seem as if the reader is obliged to undergo an experience not dissimilar to Hyde’s: we too are strangers in this place, uncertain of our direction, buffeted about unmercifully by the vagaries of a narrative that refuses to place us in the privileged position of armchair omniscience. (xvi-xvii)

Hardy’s ‘Critical Note’ is in a large part a response to Bertram’s reading of *Dragon Rampant*, her choice to respond perhaps conditioned by the historical fact of Bertram’s first-hand experience of China and because his article is the only one prior to Hardy’s to consider the volume in detail. With a little sensitive effort, and writing from a perspective that requires as its first principle sympathy, not hostility, towards women’s writing, Hardy is able to explicate Hyde’s prose in a manner that doesn’t diminish it. Thus, although she must leave her analysis without a critical resolution, she concludes by
reminding the reader of the material retrieval of a lost literary subjectivity by the New Women’s Press. The volume is a sophisticated book (as I shall argue in Chapters 5 and 6) here prepared for a sophisticated audience:

The dialogue between protest and acceptance, immanence and alienation, extinction and survival, is unresolved. In London, about a year after she left China, and shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, Robin Hyde took her own life. *Dragon Rampant* was published that year, but the worsening situation in Europe shifted people’s attention from China and the book, too, was lost. Now the New Women’s Press is giving it a chance to live among a new generation of readers. (xviii)

Hardy was also involved in the writing of a more explicitly feminist essay on Robin Hyde, the ‘Commentary’ on the 1986 reprint of *Nor the Years Condemn*. To understand better the political and epistemological context in which this essay occurred, we may return to the pages of *Broadsheet*, whose highly politicised articles provided an important forum for Hardy, together with Phillida Bunkle and Jacqueline Matthews, to establish their feminist credentials and test the critical waters. Their joint critical tone was effectively conceived in *Broadsheet*; there is little epistemological difference between the invective of their *Broadsheet* writings and the more academicised prose of their literary commentary.

A small group of Australian and New Zealand actors and filmmakers, in collaboration with Hyde’s son Derek Challis, made a film for television called *Iris*, which screened in November 1984. The film was reviewed in *Broadsheet*’s January-February 1985 issue by Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews, all writer-academics who specialised in women’s writing, women’s
history and, in Bunkle's case, women's health issues. They were highly critical of the film's premise, script, characterisation and historicisation. Despite the fact, they argued, that

biography, too, is fiction—interpretations playing footsie with some facts [...] this interpretation was intolerable. Hyde had been turned into the object of a posthumous love affair, a sort of pseudo-reverent necrophilia. (23)

Bunkle et al extrapolate from the film's presentation of Hyde a range of negative attitudes to women, from the conclusion in which

Hyde remains seated, transfixed by her image in the mirror, locked in the narcissistic pose of a woman who has never been loved, never been able to see herself in the gaze of another, while Sammy [the fictional actress playing Hyde] glides out of her body and moves away to join Kelly [the fictional screenwriter]. [...] The love of a man makes all the difference. (23)

to the way in which

[t]hroughout the film Hyde is always an object. The camera never sees as Hyde would see. The eye of the camera installs the gaze of the male as the true subject of this film. When Iris and her life-long friend 'Simone' gallop off on horses, we watch Mike (the director) watching them through the director's view finder.

Women in the film are there to be looked at. When the male egos of director and scriptwriter are not directly intruding, their surrogate, the phallic lens, is doing it for them. (24)

Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews' argument is thoroughly-researched and extensively developed; they offer much material from Hyde's early and late poems to refute the film's denial of Hyde's politics, and of her agency. They also cite material from Hyde's prose writing to attack the film's omissions concerning Hyde's subjectivity. Importantly, their article presents
an extensive knowledge of the details of Hyde’s life and circumstances, together with her writing itself, as a normal part of the process of reading Hyde. This material reflects the writers’ own research on Hyde’s life which would appear in their ‘Commentary’ to *Nor the Years Condemn*, and expands Rawlinson’s earlier pattern of citation of personal material into a general feminist interpretative practice. Their angry rhetorical questions make clear what the central tenets are in their own construction of Robin Hyde, which is implicitly presented as a more authentic truth than the film’s version of her:

Where in the film was [Hyde’s] sense of reaching out to others? Where was the woman who in the Introduction to *Dragon Rampant* speaks of being of use to the Chinese people and ‘the world we know, love and are probably about to destroy?’ Where in the film was the young woman Pat Lawlor spoke of who must have an audience, who leapt up from the press table to address a meeting in the Wellington Town Hall and ‘held two and a half thousand people spellbound with her Amazonian eloquence’?

The only shot of Hyde working as a journalist showed her at a typewriter in the *Dominion* office flirting with Timothy/Harry; where was the tough-minded parliamentary reporter who at nineteen broke new ground in women’s careers writing witty political comment for the then huge salary of £4.10.0 a week?

Where was the lame woman swung out of the way of the mounted police by an enormous labourer in the midst of the looters and ‘specials’ in the Queen Street riots of the unemployed? (25)

Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews’ Hyde is unequivocally a politicised figure, a working woman capable of lucid thinking and innovative writing and possessed of enough political commitment and *chutzpah* to take her convictions out into the public domain, both in her writing and in person
('Where was the woman who wrote of Orakei Maori land rights and of Abyssinians or Spanish Republicans fighting Mussolini’s or Franco’s fascists? Who was the only woman [to] win a war correspondent’s pass to the front in China after a speech to a Chinese and International audience of several hundred [...]?’ (25)). They are unmerciful in savaging the film’s occasional mixing of pathos and bathos (‘[t]he film suggests that [her doctor] Tothill’s refusal to take her out to dinner speeds her suicide’ (25)) with a degree of directness and annoyance that is appropriate to the magazine for which they write and the audience for which it is intended; a note to the article which reads ‘Janey Bedggood transcribed the tape’ (25) suggests that the trio’s article may even have been recorded orally rather than in written form. Most importantly, they do not present their construction of Hyde as the result of special knowledge, as Rawlinson always did by quoting from letters Hyde wrote to her. Instead, the scholar’s conversance with the archive becomes the implied norm.32

The context the article appears in is, as I have asserted, rather more feminist than literary. Hyde’s friend, Gwen Mitcalfe, was offended by Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews’s interpretation of her relationship with Hyde, so much so that she destroyed most of their correspondence, probably after reading this account of one scene from the film:

Iris and Simone [Gwen] in the bath together suggest erotic play, but Iris doesn’t look at Simone, rather we look at them. We might be watching a soft porn David Hamilton movie in which the women are arranged to arouse the observer. And lest the implicit lesbian qualities of this scene threaten us (ie the viewer, that is men), we are reassured to find that they are talking about ... men.
Compare this with the original of the scene, which is a passage in *Godwits Fly [sic]* in which Eliza/Iris looks at Simone, and sees her shoulder 'like ivory under her shabby silk nightgown'. Or compare the film's soft focus voyeurism with the poem, *Tryst*, in *The Desolate Star*, which Hyde wrote to 'Simone':

'Arms that hold you give you but again
Shadow of our splendour and our pain.
Lie at twilight, where the grasses twine...
Life's long kiss against your eyes is mine.' (24)

Though *Broadsheet* was an imagined community in which it was no slur to have 'implicit lesbian qualities' (24) in one's friendships, Mitcalfe's view was different. Although Bunkle *et al* work towards an idea of objective historical truth about Hyde, Mitcalfe's actions remind us of the constructed nature of their view of her. With this in mind, it is still important to acknowledge the importance of the work they prepared for the New Women's Press, and the way in which it opened up Hyde's writing for a newly politicised, newly interested community of readers.

For this 'new generation of readers' (1984, xviii), the jewel in the new crown of Robin Hyde criticism was the 'Commentary' Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews wrote for *Nor the Years Condemn*. Here their attention is turned on Robin Hyde in three ways: an attack on the values of cultural nationalism, both in general and as they related to readings of Hyde, a retelling of Hyde's life as heroic and political rather than tragic, and a focus on the text as exemplary, in its experimental technique, of Hyde's political commitment. The thrust of their argument is to build bridges between the concerns of the present moment and Hyde's time, the past, so that one reflects
another. This is done specifically in terms of a community of women, creating a history of feminine struggle and feminine triumph. The ‘Commentary’ in this way becomes a fulfilment of the aims of Hyde’s prose, by first reviving and then recognising them.

Typically, Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews pull no punches. Their opening thesis statement makes clear their rejection of the concerns of cultural nationalism as limited, not only as far as Hyde’s writing is concerned, but in general:

In evaluating literature for its contribution to a distinctive national culture established critics have depoliticised New Zealand writing, especially the literature of the 1930s. Middle-class male writers have defined the problems encountered by writers in this society as the distance from metropolitan culture and the absence of a New Zealand ‘past’. For Robin Hyde, the central problem of colonial society was racial, sexual, and economic conflict in a society whose very foundations were the expropriation and exploitation of land. (268)

Mary Paul has called this method of analysis ‘immersion’, in which the concerns of Hyde consistently equate with the concerns of Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews. In constructing Hyde as a positive figure, they reflexively construct themselves in this way too. Hyde’s rejection, or perhaps transcendence, of realism is conflated by the trio with her rejection of the limiting stylistic and political concerns of the cultural nationalists, here configured along the feminist lines of class and gender, as ‘[m]iddle-class male writers’:

[...] although the realist parts of her writing recognise conflict, her work strives to go beyond realism towards a vision of reconciliation, to a statement of what this society might be. This is
the location of the utopian politics of *Nor the Years Condemn*, Hyde's aspirations for her society. Hyde's work has, like that of other women writers, been depoliticised by critics ignoring these themes in favour of interior emotion and psychological distress. (268)

This contrast between the particularly feminine blend of idealism and pragmatism in Hyde's work and the rather more limited scope of the male writers of Hyde's time is extended into the authors' biographical notes on Hyde. The financial hardship she experienced as a working woman, together with her impoverished background, are contrasted, in order to highlight the writers' sense of Hyde's peculiar status, with the silly fun some of her male contemporaries were making for themselves in their early adulthood:

The social, political, and personal experience Robin Hyde or her contemporary Jean Devanny had, however reluctantly, crammed into their lives by twenty-one forms a striking contrast with that of John Mulgan or Rex Fairburn. At twenty-two the latter notes the highlights of his week as cheeking the examiner in an Economics paper or throwing a roll of toilet paper on to the stage from the gods at Extravaganza. The solitary woman writer was more of an outsider than her male counterpart. (269)

Although Bunkle *et al* reject the idea of women's suffering as necessarily meritorious, they create an alternative hierarchy in which an underprivileged background or difficult personal circumstances give a woman writer's subjectivity more value than that of those men who have had it easier. In this way, the sentence which introduces their biographical summary of Hyde's life—'Hyde's own life and work experiences were broad and often painfully various' (269)—is in itself a thesis statement asserting value. This anti-privilege trope is their argument's weakest strain; in it, they come dangerously
close to Bertram’s earlier example of special pleading, his sense that ‘no New Zealand writer has faced greater handicaps’ (1953, 191).

However, Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews do not, in general, revisit the pity and terror of Bertram’s attitude in their summary of Hyde’s life and circumstances; indeed, it is a point of view from which they wish to depart. The principal emphases of their eight-page biographical summary, which ends with the production of *Nor the Years Condemn* and thus stops short of the time covered by Hardy and Challis in the material written for *Dragon Rampant*, are Hyde’s gritty and sometimes grim determination to survive, her courage, her worldly yet spiritual optimism, and her talent:

At twenty [Hyde’s] professional success was swiftly halted when a brief love affair in Rotorua left her pregnant. [...] Seven months in Sydney’s slums, sick and living on mandarins, or doing odd jobs for her keep, ended with the clandestine birth of a stillborn baby whom she called ‘Robin Hyde’ and whose name she used for her serious writing from then on. (269-70)

Shocked that unemployed women received no dole or relief work, though when in work all women were taxed to provide these benefits, Hyde presented a petition on their behalf to the mayor of Auckland, calling for government action. (272-3)

A marked change in Hyde’s orientation and confidence is visible in 1936-37. She looks to New Zealand’s history and stories, Maori and Pakeha; she is more assertive about ‘women’s’ issues (she writes for and was from the beginning on the board of *Woman Today*, a pioneer Marxist-feminist paper); questions of peace, internationalism and social justice are treated more directly. [...] Her comments on power relationships and their abuse, on blinkered Pakeha vision, the freedom of the press and anti-feminist fellow writers become blunt and outspoken. (274-5)

In this, Bunkle *et al* reprise the points of their review of *Iris*, but
with a more moderate, scholarly tone; they also echo the key points of Rawlinson's 1952 analysis. What is important about their summary of Hyde's life is the way it posits a new literary subjectivity for her; when they move from discussion of her actions to discussion of her writing, it is with the same emphasis on courage, practicality and, above all, originality:

_Nor the Years Condemn_, the book Hyde wrote in 1937, is an intricate gathering of all these strands. She began it within weeks of finishing _The Godwits Fly_ and it is a sequel to that book as much as to _Passport to Hell_. (Indeed it reworks material from her first version of _Godwits_ which had moved through New Zealand and into the Depression years.) (275)

In _Nor the Years Condemn_, Hyde 'turns her hair up under her cap' and goes tramping, not around Europe [as Timothy in _The Godwits Fly_ intended to do] but around New Zealand, to discover the untamed land, to steal Christmas turkeys, to live with Maori girls in the pa, work on construction sites for big money and lose all at two-up. To join the male sub-culture, to see every corner of her country, to shake off the restraints of suburban respectability, to explore the life on the road she became a persona for which there was no female type. To taste the reality that had been denied her and to keep the ideal alive, Hyde becomes a 'fuzzy tramp'. This time she is not left behind. (276)

In this innovative analysis, the real-life character of Starkie whom Hyde had profiled in _Passport to Hell_ is transformed into her male persona in _Nor the Years Condemn_, his journey replacing and redeeming the journey that Hyde/Eliza was unable to make with Harry/Timothy, both in life and in _The Godwits Fly_. _Nor the Years Condemn_ thus becomes a redemptive manifesto for Hyde's politics and for her subjectivity. In the eyes of Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews, Hyde is the equal, and often the superior, of any man. In this, they reflect their cultural position as second-wave feminists, with the concomitant
belief that women must not only catch up with men in terms of access to political opportunity and creative success, they must also surpass them and take the social lead, in order to transform the sexist culture that has denied their humanity.

The second, third and fourth sections of Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews's four-part commentary analyse *Nor the Years Condemn* in terms of its exposition of three feminist concerns. In 'The Land and People', Rawlinson's notion of Hyde's 'journey to New Zealand' (277) is revisited and revised, and Bunkle *et al* describe the way in which Hyde's sense of the local, unlike that of her cultural nationalist contemporaries, includes an awareness of local history and of the prior, continuing Maori narrative, now fragmented by displacement, poverty and the suppression of tikanga. 'It is this belief that New Zealand was a "locked treasure chest" of stories,' they argue, 'that distinguishes Hyde's journey to New Zealand from those of some of her better known male contemporaries' (278), noting also that 'Hyde locates the alienation of New Zealanders, from each other and from their land, not in some metaphysical or existential loneliness, nor in the youth of the culture, but in the expropriation and racial hostility that began in what she called bluntly "the land-grabbing wars"' (279). On the presentation of Maori characters, the writers observe that

[...] alienation also takes the form of a double dispossession—the taking of the land from the Maori, and the taking of the Maori from the land. Most of the Maoris Starkie meets on his travels are a 'beaten people', deprived of everything but their dreams. Even the river, Waikato, scorns them as 'defectors'. Some, like the woman he thinks he might marry, Opal (Chapter 9), are lost
between the decaying, listless life of the pa, and the brutality and expediency of the Pakeha world. Yolande, the girl Starkie meets on his trip up the Wanganui river, is literally sick and dying, enveloped in a general fatalism. The pathos of her end is repeated in the dying of another Maori woman, Ritehei, Starkie’s second wife. (281)

Although Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews are right to draw the reader’s attention to the presence of Maori characters in Hyde’s narrative, they view her exposition of their decline as positive rather than negative, ignoring the way in which Hyde’s imagining of the Maori people in crisis is fatalistic and reductive in the same manner as earlier views of Hyde herself were. The thoughts Hyde expresses about Maori in A Home in this World are strikingly similar in tone to Bertram’s own consideration of her in his ‘Reassessment’, or even some of Rawlinson’s private comments about Hyde’s death, such as her remark to Schroder that ‘she would have done it [...] sooner or later—she was just made that way’ (27 January 1948). In Challis’s volume, Hyde writes that she wants to

\[
tidy up the shack dwellings and shack destinies of our own thin Maoris in the north (but not to such an extent that the smell of soap and socialism would wreck their faith in human nature for ever, poor gay dears. Well said some philosopher whose name I forget, ‘Whatever is good, laughs.’ And they laugh). (10)
\]

This sense of management, of ‘putting right’, is close in spirit to the cultural nationalists whose analyses Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews reject. Hyde’s attitude to Maori is positive and exceptionally well-intended, but it is also parental and didactic, in the manner of her times. There is a risk in Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews’s assessment of over-rehabilitating Hyde, of
making her into a figure beyond what she was or can be, of seeing in her not just type, but archetype. In the third section of their ‘Commentary’, ‘From Social Realism to Utopian Politics’, this idealising of Hyde is complicated by the way in which Hyde seems to have herself attempted to assume this role of the writer-prophet in order both to present and to change the nature of her society. In analysing this complex project, Bunkle et al continually remind us of the gendered nature of Hyde’s view:

In *Nor the Years Condemn* we see the rich and powerful, the military and civilian authorities, malevolent or benign, but always from below. We are down among tunnellers and waitresses, construction workers and housemaids. The view is panoramic but the marginal people determine the perspective. In the brief boom they are not necessarily destitute. [...] But they have no control over their lives. (283)

Although Hyde has tucked her hair under Starkie’s cap his/her encounters with women reveal that reality is not the same for women as for men; they have conflicting needs and aspirations. [...] This dual reality is transcribed more fully in the Starkie-Ritehei marriage. The ambivalence of the masculine role of protector and provider has been foreshadowed in his relationships with other women. [...] He persuades Ritehei not to ‘have the killer in’ when she is pregnant with her fifth child, the second to him. He never thinks that he could be the killer for Ritehei—that having two more babies so quickly could be the final fatal burden for her broken body and spirit. (284)

The other important point which this section of the analysis draws our attention to is the notion that Hyde in her novel ‘is determined to expose the war myths of patriotism, glory and victory by drawing attention to the waste and suffering that has been obscured by distance and rhetoric’ (285), and that Hyde offers an alternative to these myths in her utopian vision of a
transformed society, a 'revolution of the human spirit' (287): 'These politics are carried in a metaphor which weaves through the text of Nor the Years Condemn. New Zealand society is imaged as a body which has been wounded and infected—an organism which can heal itself only through the unfolding of its own will to live' (287). Again, we see the way in which Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews take Hyde's ability as a writer seriously; their analysis emphasises process, choice and technical control in her work. Although they write out of their own historical moment, their work is important because it takes its construction of Hyde's literary subjectivity seriously; their argument is an act of respect and retrieval.

In their final section, 'Hyde's Masquerade', they consider the idea of Hyde's work as 'women's writing' (288), weaving a complex argument which finds in Hyde's narrative technique evidence to support Luce Irigaray's ideas about women's masquerade:

We seem to have a double masquerade here: not only is Hyde 'repeating' what was told her by a man, she has also devised a signature whose gender is ambiguous, and which puns on a word which itself means concealment or disappearance (Hyde/hide).

(288)

[Hyde] did not want simply to exchange one script for another, to lose herself in the impersonation. 'Being a man' was no solution to the painful constriction of 'being a woman'. So Hyde attempted, in this book, much more than a repetition of the reminiscences of Douglas Stark. As Irigaray suggests, women—expert at reproducing the privileged language of men—may at the same time 'point to the possibility of another language'. Bede Collins speculates about 'a dialect laid over speech to conceal it, a cipher ... the funny things we all say off pat, over and over again. And underneath it, what?' (289)
The analysis here is more than thorough enough to explain the thing which so puzzled earlier critics: 'the diffuse, convoluted quality of [Hyde's] writing' (289). Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews's achievement is again to reveal Hyde's writing as serious, self-conscious work which puts literary means to political ends. Their feminist dislike of cultural nationalism gives them sufficient critical distance to re-view Hyde's writing, meaning they can construct Hyde as a visionary rather than a tragic figure. Their 'Commentary' is an important part of the 1980s' retrieval of Hyde, which reconstructed and returned her to the reader anew.

The disadvantage, as I have asserted already, of the viewpoint presented in the 'Commentary', is that it presents Hyde's unpublished manuscripts as a unified, unproblematic source of additional biographical and textual information. The reality, it is important to note, was more complex; at least one of the trio (Bunkle) stayed at the home of Derek Challis in order to carry out research among the Challis collection of manuscripts, and, as critics' interest in the unpublished material grew, it became necessary for Challis to place more explicit restrictions on them in order to protect his and Rawlinson's biography. Thus, access to Hyde's 1934 'Autobiography' and her 'Journal' of 1935, held at the Auckland Public Library, was restricted to reading only by those who had written permission from Challis, following extensive quotation of the volumes' biographical detail by Bunkle et al, and later Boddy & Matthews.

But in 1986 such decisions were still in the future, and Bunkle,
Hardy and Matthews’s ‘Commentary’ contributed to a flowering of academic research on Robin Hyde in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This research saw the appearance of several postgraduate theses concerned with analysing and contextualising Hyde’s work, often along with that of other women writers. These included a number of masters theses written at the University of Auckland, with such titles as ‘For Wednesday's to come [sic]: the relation between the fiction of Robin Hyde and later critical theories’ (Patricia McCourtie-Hill, 1994), ‘She'll be right: feminine perspective in New Zealand fiction’ (Sue Carter, 1994) and ‘The illegitimate artist: marginality and maternity in the autobiography of Robin Hyde’ (Tracey Slaughter, 1995). By 1995, Hyde was re-established as a writer; her novels and, less often, her poetry taught in university courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.36 The Auckland analyses I have mentioned were preceded in 1990 by two PhD theses, one by Susan Ash at the University of Otago, ‘Narrating a Female (Subject)ivity in the Works of Katherine Mansfield, Robin Hyde, Janet Frame and Keri Hulme’, and the other by Elizabeth Thomas at the University of Canterbury, ‘Appropriation, Subversion and Separatism: The Strategies of Three New Zealand Women Novelists: Jane Mander, Robin Hyde and Sylvia Ashton-Warner’.

Ash’s thesis used the narrative theories of Gerard Gennette to create a detailed stylistics of women’s writing, which included an analysis of Passport to Hell and The Godwits Fly, while Thomas expanded Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews’s case for misogyny as a governing dynamic of cultural
nationalist criticism, in order to read Hyde’s novels as strategic responses to the pressures of her times. Ash’s PhD thesis was preceded in 1989 by her ‘Introduction’ and ‘Critical Afterword’ to the reprint of *Wednesday’s Children*, in which she makes an argument validating the thinking behind the protagonist’s suicide. Her explanation is one which has been made by feminist critics on behalf of other self-destructing heroines: better madness and death than living under the patriarchy. Ash asserts that although ‘[t]o some readers, Wednesday may exemplify a “childish” evasion of reality through fantasy’ (216), we must accept that

fantasy (like madness) is a valid, powerful means for creating alternatives to unacceptable possibilities in women’s lives. By scrutinising prevailing cultural images and assumptions, fantasy pushes the imagination forward. [...] [W]e need not see those women who perish as simply inadequate to the task confronting them. Wednesday’s suicide is not a failure to live in the ‘real’ world, but rather a disavowal of a society which marginalises and trivialises female experience. (216)

Ash’s argument rehabilitates not only Wednesday, but Hyde as well, casting not only Wednesday’s suicide, but also, by implication, Hyde’s, as a ‘disavowal of a society which marginalises and trivialises female experience’ (216). This argument is deeply sourced in feminist thought and theories of women’s writing. Ash suggests in her introduction that ‘Hyde’s work prefigured that of modern feminist critics in showing how a woman’s spiritual quest can provide new visions of individual power that can inspire the transformation of a culture or a society’ (7), citing in her footnotes Carol Christ’s 1980 work *Deep Diving and Surfacing* as a late twentieth-century
example of this theory. *Wednesday's Children* was the last of Hyde's volumes to be reprinted by the New Women's Press, and Ash's feminist introduction can thus be seen as the stopping-place of the 'pure' feminist trajectory of Robin Hyde research. Before I consider what came next, I want to return again to Rawlinson, to consider the two critics whose work ensured the continuance of her critical perspective into the 1990s, a perspective that remained less politicised and less gendered than its feminist complement. The two key figures here are Hyde's son, Derek Challis, and Patrick Sandbrook, an academic associated with Massey University.

'Tomorrow I’m nothing.... a mirror, faint-silvered by breath': autobiography and biographical criticism.37

Challis was the legal owner, from the time of his majority in 1951, of many of Robin Hyde’s papers, including the 1935 ‘Journal’ written for Gilbert Tothill, Hyde’s doctor at Avondale38 (where she lived in the Lodge of the Auckland Mental Hospital from 1933 to early 1937), Hyde’s several attempts at the novel that eventually became *The Godwits Fly* (as well as parts of *Nor the Years Condemn*), and an autobiographical manuscript written after Hyde had left the Lodge in 1937.39 During the 1950s, 60s and 70s there was very little interest in these papers outside Rawlinson’s research for the biography, and, as I have mentioned earlier, Rawlinson had anyway decided to restrict access to herself and Challis while their research was in progress.

In the 1970s, some time after work on the biography had stalled, Sandbrook began his bibliographical work on Hyde, making a descriptive list
of the locations of all papers concerned with her, and paying analytical
attention to the writerly processes evident in the development of the proto-
Work’, appeared in 1985. It was the first piece of major academic research to
be concerned exclusively with Hyde, and in this was many years ahead of the
rest of the field. It was also the point of origin of the argument that Hyde was
an original, self-aware writer making literary and technical choices about her
work, and was thus the source of the important rehabilitative idea that, as
Sandbrook asserts in his opening words, Hyde’s ‘critical statements on the
nature and function of art, her letters, notebooks, drafts of novels and the
novels themselves [...] establish that Hyde was a careful and deliberate as well
as a gifted writer’ (1).

Mary Paul suggests that Sandbrook’s thesis ‘uses an old-
fashioned literary critical mode’ in which Hyde ‘is identified as a gifted
individual struggling within a narrowminded society, rather than a writer
whose choice of material, preoccupation and genre tendencies were shaped by
her context, as much as she herself shaped these elements’ (150). This latter
alternative is in fact Paul’s critical model, which I shall discuss later; here it is
enough to suggest that we may view Sandbrook’s argument and indeed
method as proceeding from the work done by Rawlinson and Challis already,
using their privileged access to Hyde’s papers to construct a scholarly
argument based on description and quotation of a wide variety of texts. In
retaining the idea of the artist struggling to transform society and constructing
Hyde as an artist with a project and a destiny out of step with her time, Sandbrook’s thesis (and the article which arose from it, ‘A descriptive inventory of some manuscripts and drafts of the work of Robin Hyde’, published in the *Journal of New Zealand Literature* in 1986) departs from some aspects of cultural nationalism and develops others.

Away from the pressure of reading Hyde’s writing in terms of its contribution to a national identity, Sandbrook is able to bring to bear the same sympathy and sensitivity to Hyde’s work as Hardy does in her ‘Critical Note’ to *Dragon Rampant*. Without the focus on ‘themes’ that Rawlinson had shared with Stevens and Hankin, Sandbrook can introduce the reader not only to the depth and complexity of Hyde’s writerly praxis, but also to the volume of her unpublished manuscripts, making the reader aware of the diasporic nature of Hyde’s literary presence in archives all over New Zealand. This is the element of factual detail missing from the work of Bunkle *et al.* Sandbrook’s thesis alerts us to the sheer scale as well as the skill of Hyde’s writing. It also shows us that it is possible to take a positive view of Hyde’s literary subjectivity that is not predicated exclusively on gender, a point which was to become important later on.

In the year before Sandbrook’s thesis was awarded, Hyde’s 1937 autobiographical manuscript was published by Longman Paul as *A Home in this World*, together with the fragment, ‘A Night of Hell’, which follows its protagonist, Bede, through morphine-induced *delirium tremens*. The publication of *A Home in this World* was a long time coming; Challis had first
approached Blackwood Paul with it in the 1960s, but the publisher felt there would be little public interest in such a text at that time without a biographical introduction, which was then precluded by the ongoing work on Rawlinson’s biography. When *A Home in this World* finally appeared in 1984 it was well-received and quickly became an influential and intriguing text for those interested in Hyde or in women’s writing in New Zealand.

It was also, together with the reprint of *Dragon Rampant* in the same year, Challis’s first appearance as a textual commentator on his mother’s life and work. Mary Paul suggests that Challis’s ‘account of [Hyde’s] life mirrors the difficulty his mother had in telling her own story. He circles around his subject, not moving linearly but coming back to one period several times’ (137) and notes also that Challis is throughout ‘[s]peaking of himself in the third person’ (137). I want to suggest that, as well as focussing on Challis’s textual attitude to Hyde as his mother in his 1984 introductions, we should pay attention to the way in which Challis’s texts echo Rawlinson’s earlier essays on Hyde, in tone, structure and use of material.

Rawlinson and Challis, and Sandbrook too, are judicious in their textual treatment of Robin Hyde; their writings are typified by a respectful, dignified tone, modestly-framed assertions (when compared with both the *braggadoccio* of Hyde’s male contemporaries, or the feminist reclaims I have discussed above) and sensitive attention to detail. Rawlinson’s 1970 conclusion that ‘[t]he foregoing is a brief outline of Robin Hyde’s struggle to
break fresh ground in New Zealand writing with a book about which she thought, talked and wrote to friends more often than any other’ (xiv) is complemented by Challis’s 1984 words about Hyde’s ‘struggle’, at home and abroad:

Her unusual abilities and needs were recognised by several members of the medical staff [at Avondale], including the Superintendent, Dr H. M. Buchanan, and her own psychiatrist, Dr G. M. Tothill (Drs Salys and Geranty in A Home in this World). She was encouraged to write and […] [at Tothill’s] suggestion she wrote an extensive and detailed autobiographical journal as an exercise in self-analysis.

A Home in this World owes much to this exercise; not so much in the detail of the story told as in the direct and completely unreserved style in which the events are related. It is this frankness combined with the exceptional beauty and sensitivity of the writing that makes the work Robin Hyde’s finest.

There is a sense of maturity and self-awareness, an appreciation of the potential greatness of the human spirit. (A Home in this World, x)

On 18 January 1938 against the advice of her doctors, to the dismay of many of her friends, and with some misgiving on her own part, Robin Hyde left Auckland for London. Her reasons were many. As a writer she felt the need to experience great adventure, to go boldly into the world and mingle with and share the thoughts and ways of other people. She felt too, more practically, that if she could collect unusual material and make a book interesting enough to be successful in England, then her own country would perhaps recognise her merit as a writer. And she wanted to earn enough to be able to live in security with her child in her own country and there write the poetry she cared so much about. (Dragon Rampant, iii-iv)

Challis’s entry into the Hydian critical discourse, his work complemented by Sandbrook’s, is an important part of the story of Robin Hyde research. Challis’s textual as well as personal fidelity to the memory of Hyde is
reflected in his persistence, following Rawlinson, in bringing Hyde’s work to the public in both fair and rough critical weather.

Although the biographical and feminist strands of Robin Hyde criticism had operated with some degree of independence in the 1980s, the 1990s saw the consolidation of the previous decade’s work in a coming together of the two schools to form once again what can be thought of as a single body of Robin Hyde criticism. This consensus of critical ideas was not a rapid process, nor was it without its problems. But it remains appropriate to view the last ten years of Robin Hyde criticism as a time of relative harmony compared to previous decades. With the rise in public interest in Hyde’s writing came the critical self-awareness, both within and without the academy, that led to a tolerance of critical diversity rather than the previous models of cultural nationalist thesis and feminist antithesis, or Rawlinson’s biographically-conditioned research.

The archival research that Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews had begun in preparing their ‘Commentary’ for *Nor the Years Condemn* was continued in another project which was initiated by Bunkle and Wendy Harrex, but eventually carried out by Matthews and Gillian Boddy and published by Victoria University Press. This appeared in 1991 as *Disputed Ground: Robin Hyde, Journalist*, and consisted of two-thirds Hyde, with selections from her newspaper and magazine work and her 1934 memoir *Journalese*, and one third Boddy & Matthews, with their respective essays, ‘The Life of Robin Hyde’ (3-81) and ‘The Journalism of Robin Hyde’ (83-141).
Illustrated throughout with photos of Hyde, her life and her times, the volume is attractively presented for commercial sale, and, more importantly for our purposes, a consolidation of personal biography and literary analysis. Boddy & Matthews draw on all the strands of the critical heritage, constructing Hyde as a woman and a writer and her writing as of its time and of the present day:

Her letters to Schroder at this time are lively and seem spontaneous, yet she deliberately conceals the pregnancy which must have dominated her life. Her tendency to shape the truth to suit a particular perspective developed as she found it increasingly necessary to protect herself. The result was a kind of double life, a skilful duplicity which frequently isolated her from those whose support she most needed. Sometimes she seemed to compensate for this by telling her friends dramatically elaborated accounts of incidents in her life. In some articles she used her own experiences as copy, presenting them anonymously. Finally these secret experiences and emotions became sources for her poetry and fiction, releasing 'the dark self that stumbling in the mind / Strikes from old flint.' (34)

We see in this extract from Boddy's essay her debt both to Rawlinson and Challis, in her use of biographical detail to account for Hyde's writing, both published and unpublished, and to her feminist colleagues in her focus on the difficult physical and emotional circumstances of Hyde's pregnancy. Matthews's consideration of Hyde's journalism follows a similar path and again we see Hyde as woman and writer, her work as both original and historical:

The breadth of Hyde's reading is considerable and writing about reading is a big part of her journalism. Between 1928 and 1938 she wrote hundreds of articles and book reviews, some quite substantial, others brief but acute. Whether it was in a major essay or a short review, Hyde always spoke as a writer on other writers, as a practitioner not as a detached critic. She saw the
author at work, rather than an autonomous text. Her comments on nineteenth-century writers recall those of their contemporary feminist critics whose writings are available to us but were not to Hyde. (112-13)

Boddy & Matthews’s selection of Hyde’s journalism is likewise a balanced synthesis of styles; the divisions they make among their selections are often taken from Hyde’s own words and reflect the whimsy and savvy of her work: ‘Squirting Ink’ (145-76), ‘A Crick in the Neck’ (177-210), ‘Among the Books’ (211-31), ‘Miracle Men & Women’ (233-48), ‘People and Politics’ (249-308), ‘Our Own Song’ (309-58) and ‘International’ (359-93). Well-designed and well-edited, Disputed Ground, like Journalese almost sixty years earlier, sold only a few copies and failed to make a profit. Its academic importance, however, remains considerable; it gave a concise, palpable textuality to Hyde’s journalism and, as I have asserted, drew together what had previously been disparate ways of reading Hyde’s writing.

This critical consolidation was not without its problems. Although Boddy & Matthews assert that their volume ‘is not [...] intended as a biography but as an introduction to [...] aspects of [Hyde’s] life and work’, their extensive use of biographical material created some anxiety for Challis in the years that followed the volume’s publication, as thesis writers, journalists and the interested public alike sought access to Hyde’s unpublished papers, including those held in his possession.

Boddy & Matthews’s project, like that of their colleagues Bunkle and Hardy, had benefitted very much from Challis’s goodwill and provision
of access to unpublished material over which he retained control. The subsequent increase in other people's interest that I mention above evoked the possibility of a critical and biographical free-for-all, something that threatened directly Rawlinson's biographical project, of which Challis assumed control after Rawlinson's death in 1995. After this time, Challis moved to limit access to Hyde's 'Autobiography' and 'Journal', the only public holdings over which he retained control, to those who had written permission from him; transcription was prohibited. Thus the unlimited scholarly access of Bunkle, Hardy, Boddy and Matthews has become an interlude in a tradition of scholarly restriction, as Challis continues Rawlinson's biographical project in the spirit of special inheritance with which it was begun.

Hyde's feminist advocates came from backgrounds which included social pragmatism as well as literary and historical interests. Gillian Boddy went on to become head of Family Planning New Zealand, while Phillida Bunkle has served as a member of the New Zealand Parliament since 1996. The critic who came to prominence after *Disputed Ground*’s publication was also a feminist, but from a different tradition. Michele Leggott, a poet and academic, first encountered Hyde’s writing when *A Home in this World* was published in 1984 (see note 40). As Paul explains, Leggott ‘first read Hyde as a university teacher, and grew so interested in her poetry that she incorporated lines and echoes from Hyde in her own series “Blue Irises”, only later coming to write on her in a more academic context’ (147). This combination of the personal, the creative and the academic is the defining
triad of Leggott's appropriation of Hyde, whose literary and critical style has become, by its textual rhetoric and authorial charisma, a methodological and stylistic ur-text for Robin Hyde criticism since the mid-1990s. How Leggott's analysis works needs to be explained, along with a mapping of its influence and its limits.

'I know thee, all thou art — / A dream has told me': Leggott's textual inferences.

Leggott's writerly interest in Robin Hyde came to prominence in 1994-95, with the appearance in 1994 of her third collection of poetry, *DIA*, which included the sequence 'Blue Irises' which Paul mentions above. In the same year, an article by Leggott was published in the women's studies journal *Hecate*, entitled 'Opening the Archive: Robin Hyde, Eileen Duggan and the Persistence of Record'. By the time this article was reprinted the following year in a volume which Leggott co-edited, *Opening the Book: New Essays on New Zealand Writing*, her reputation as a Robin Hyde scholar was established in the academy. It was also in 1995 that Leggott, with her student Lisa Docherty, re-catalogued for the Auckland University Library the collection of Hyde poetry manuscripts which Rawlinson had prepared in the 1940s, creating an 'Inventory of Poetry Manuscripts' which clarified and expanded the work Rawlinson had already done.

What, then, is the thesis which Leggott argues, and why has it had so much influence on Robin Hyde studies? At its heart, Leggott's argument calls for a return to reading, of Robin Hyde, of women poets, of manuscripts
and of poetry itself. This call is consistent across her work of this period, in both poetry and prose:

    I want heart but I want scope too. Big projects for poetry, like raiding and rewriting its androcentric history. I am not interested in the one-page poem unless it is a constituent of something bigger, unless its brevity is a training ground so I can read to marathon length. This is where complexity comes in, and I welcome it. Complexity is about endurance, about surviving over time and distance to ask old questions in new places. (DIA 1994, 26)

After 1939 the fight was lost along with Hyde’s life and the intervention of the second war. What remains to us are the poems and their codings, plus the orientations of Hyde’s essay journalism, letters and autobiographical prose. A selection of that journalism is currently in print; the poems, letters and autobiographical material are out of print or still in manuscript. Why are we so slow to read the poet who most disrupts the orthodoxy set up by the contents and introduction of A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-1945? (‘Opening the Archive’ 1995, 276)

Now we should turn to the manuscripts collected with utterly partisan care by Julia McLeely and Grace Burgess [of Eileen Duggan’s writing], by Bill Edge, Gloria Rawlinson and Derek Challis, and begin to read. (290)

We can see two things here: that Leggott’s argument has more than a hint of a long-term project about it, and that this project is grand in scale: to return Robin Hyde’s poetry to the reading public, with the subsequent re-orienting of Hyde’s status as a writer that this implies. To this end, Leggott is a powerful and indeed forceful rhetorician, writing in a manner that reorganises the foci of Robin Hyde research, so that Hyde appears not merely as a figure who wrote well in many different genres, but as the Poet-Artist she herself aspired to be. Thus, in Leggott’s analysis, the project of the
schorlers associated with the New Women’s Press becomes the background to her own work of bringing the distant past into the immediate present:

When Gillian Boddy in 1991 quotes Pat Lawlor in 1935 quoting Jessie Mackay several years previously on the subject of her younger contemporaries Eileen Duggan and Robin Hyde, the voice on the wind seems impossibly distant. To ground Mackay’s statement and its original context is one search among many that might alter the sense we presently have of all three writers as peripheral to the founding of a canon of New Zealand poetry. (266)

These redistributive aims are also present in Leggott’s poetry, as she explains in her ‘note’ to DIA:

It is time we listened in other places in order to draw some of those shadowy figures back into the conversation about language and place. To this end I have practised a kind of ventriloquism, picking out white-hot lines from the poems of (among others) Robin Hyde and Eileen Duggan and recombining them with an ear for the heart, complexity, and engagement with which they were written. This is homage. (26)

These general attributions leave the reader to engage in the research and reading which Leggott herself has already done, engaging in a game with is an unusual mixture of the academic and the playfully postmodern. The poems of ‘Blue Irises’ thus become a sequence of cryptograms; word puzzles which force the reader to ‘begin to read’ (1995, 290) in the fashion that Leggott has instructed.

In this manner, Leggott not only reconstructs literary history, but also writing itself. She uses images of discovery and construction alongside each other, so that her work reads as both an archaeology and an architecture of Robin Hyde, rather than a more fully postmodern exercise in
historiography. Thus, after the assertion in _DIA_ that her ‘ventriloquism’ of Hyde _et al_’s ‘white-hot lines’ is not plagiarism but ‘homage’, Leggott explains that this homage has ‘also shown me how to make a matrix where none was visible or audible. It is a kind of speaking together, problematic but full of possibilities’ (26). In ‘Opening the Archive’, however, she argues for the necessity of discovering, rather than ‘mak[ing]’ this ‘matrix’: ‘There is a lost matrix of women poets whose presence in our literature needs urgent reappraisal. How it was lost, and why, are absorbing questions; but more important still is the matter and nature of matrix, with its suggestions of support, nurture and numerousness’ (267).

Elsewhere, Leggott’s approach to the tension between the roles of researcher and inventor is more irreverent; indeed, she goes to the extent of laying literary traps for the unwary dilettante, as the next extracts show:

> _Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task._  
> _The rest is the madness of art._ —Henry James

I am working in the dark, trying to bridge the distance between their tradition and my standpoint, convinced these women have something to say that I need to hear. I am moving by a kind of textual infra-red, looking for places that make light of historical distance or heat up connections to the present. (1995, 269)

> We can all write heart poems, the ones that take breath away or make tears and laughter come. […] Sometimes they step from the shadows when you were thinking about something else entirely. You ignore the tearing sound at your peril; they always have something to say. We work in the dark, they say, we do what we can. We give what we have. Our doubt is our passion. Our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art. You can quote me. (1994, 26)

There is throughout Leggott’s writing a tension between the unreliability of
language and the passion of its speaker, between textual unreliability and emotional truth. Her turning away from critics such as Boddy, whose research produces only a ‘voice on the wind’ which ‘seems impossibly distant’ (266), means that her own work necessarily takes a new prominence in Robin Hyde research. Leggott makes apparent in her text a sense of working alone, outside of a community of research, which is in notable contrast with the earlier collaborative efforts of Bunkle et al. By such assertions as ‘I am working in the dark’ or ‘I am moving by a kind of textual infra-red’ (269), Leggott’s present-day is ironically emptied of the very literary community whose work precedes her own. It is clear that in attending Hyde’s poetry, particularly the many poems that remain unpublished, Leggott in ‘Opening the Archive’ feels that she is travelling alone.

Despite this sense of isolation, Leggott’s re-reading of Hyde’s poetry introduces to the reader much that is new and important. Most famously, Leggott identifies, specifically in the sequence ‘The Beaches’ from the longer series ‘Houses by the Sea’, a series of revelations ‘[f]olded into it, by enigma and double coding’: ‘the narratives of emergent female sexuality, something coming the other way, determining contemporary possibility against a dream of history’ (270). What Leggott seems to mean by this last sentence is that it is possible to find in the present day references to a genital femininity that is both anatomical and metaphorical. Once Leggott has identified the former, as ‘a vulval image [...] masked for propriety’ (271) in the lines ‘What makes the sweethearts quarrel? / Third mouth, pink as coral’
the metaphorical becomes easier to elucidate: 'Hot cream flood, peaks and shouts, coral pink mouth. Hyde hides what androcratic society will not countenance: sexuality celebrated and inscribed by a woman' (271). These specificities then enable Leggott to define her wider poetics of Hyde, woman and writer:

Hyde is about hiding, about surviving by hiding, and she stamps the exigency as a personal signature in every part of her work. It starts with the deliberate androgyny of the assumed name but it travels also through endless references in her poems to rainbows, prisms, bridges and arcs. The rainbow is the sign of Iris, she who connects heaven and earth; Iris Wilkinson elaborated the clue of her given name, producing an exquisite tension between presence and concealment of herself in her work. (271)

There seems no reason to disagree with Leggott’s poetic schema; her subsequent description of what she calls Hyde’s ‘baby poems’ as ‘deeply hidden and obliquely expressed’ (288) and thus evoking the loss of Hyde’s first son, is both literary and wise: ‘Ghosts like Hyde’s never leave entirely though they may be made over’ (289). Despite Leggott’s assertion of her textual isolation, the insights her argument presents for the reader can be read as achieved by an analytical means which has more in common with her feminist precursors than she suggests. A constituent part of Leggott’s feminism seems to be its inversions of masculine equivalents; thus we should read Hyde because she ‘most disrupts the orthodoxy set up’ (276) in Curnow’s 1945 poetry anthology, or because her poems contain not the singular, masculine phallus, but multiple hips and thighs, breasts and genitals. Of the lines ‘rose afterglow / In endless stillness: prowling to the crests / Of
great bare hills, upthrust like goddess-breasts’ (277-8) from the poem ‘Zoological’, Leggott suggests that ‘[t]he juxtaposition of goddess-breasts and local hills is strange only until vision doubles and we see what is before us—the geomorphic body of Papatuanuku’ (278). And Leggott situates her own research within the tracing of what Patrick Evans has called ‘the distaff line’, that ‘lost matrix of women poets’ (Leggott, 267) whose recovery gives us ‘a capacity for shaping New Zealand poetry in the first half of the century as a politically alert, humanitarian enterprise, diverse in its subjects and styles but run on sympathetic and highly reticulated energies that took as their point of departure the socially progressive atmosphere of the late colonial period’ (267-8).

The problem here is the dialectical relationship between Leggott’s reconstructed poetics and the ‘cultural nationalism inimical to previous competences’ (266) whose influence she wants to refute. In the pairings I have identified—orthodoxy/unorthodoxy, phallus/vulva, ‘the colonial dilemma’ (Bertram 1953, 191)/‘the socially progressive atmosphere of the late colonial period’ (Leggott 1995, 268)—we can see the way in which Leggott’s approach is similar to the feminism of Bunkle et al, which was itself locked in dialectic with the masculinism of the cultural nationalists. In such a dialectic, feminism functions as a kind of ‘better’ masculinism, matching the dominant discourse’s concerns with a tit-for-tat offering of feminine equivalents. Leggott does not, in her 1995 article, identify any difficulty in this particular dialectic, nor does she signal explicitly any alternatives. By 1999, however,
she is pursuing another line of Robin Hyde research, and we find in a volume by Mary Paul, published in that year, a rehearsal of the problem I have just identified. Along with another volume by a scholar working in the tradition of Challis and Sandbrook, Paul’s *Her Side of the Story: Readings of Mander, Mansfield, & Hyde* and Leggott’s editing of *The Book of Nadath* provide the final touchstones of my analysis of the Robin Hyde critical tradition.

Postgraduate research at the University of Auckland reflected growing interest in archival collections of Robin Hyde’s material, as signalled by Leggott in her 1995 article. Brigid Shadbolt completed in 1994 a thesis entitled ‘Commonplaces: The Letters of Robin Hyde & John A. Lee 1935-1939’, which included an edition of the Hyde-Lee letters, drawn from the collection held at the Auckland Public Library. Shadbolt suggests in her abstract that ‘[t]he Hyde / Lee correspondence opens a space of interaction between gender, politics and history that prompts a reconsideration of biography and the processes of national identity’ (n.p.). A similar case is made by Jane Moloney for the then unpublished manuscripts of the long prose-poem ‘Nadath’, in her 1996 M.Phil thesis, ‘Another Story: Locating Robin Hyde’s “The Book of Nadath”’. Moloney’s thesis presents an accomplished close reading of the fragmented text, arguing that

Hyde’s focus on the crisis in collective identity in ‘The Book of Nadath’ does not centre on the search for self by Nadath as his identities are already fictitious and correspondingly difficult to secure. The text floats across the specifics of identity that would prevent it from achieving its aim of a (particularly modernist) universalism whilst drawing on a vast number of ‘voices’ and cultural identities in support of that project. (65)
Moloney’s subsequent analysis echoes Shadbolt in its examination of the new dynamics ‘The Book of Nadath’ presents between ‘gender, politics and history’ (1994, n.p.), embodied in Hyde’s recasting, through the words of the false prophet Nadath, of the ideas and narratives of both the Bible and Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* : ‘If *Thus Spake Zarathustra* could be summarised as an attempt to overcome the nihilistic impasse caused by cultural crisis and a loss of faith and *The Bible* as offering the hope that it is possible for humanity to live in peace, with dignity, justice and equality, the “The Book of Nadath” could be said to draw the two together’ (79).

Another student, Lisa Docherty (who had collaborated with Leggott on the inventory of Robin Hyde poetry manuscripts), began after 1996 work on a PhD which aimed to provide an analytical edition of Hyde’s letters to J. H. E. Schroder and W. Downie Stewart; this project was supervised by Leggott. Leggott herself continued to work on Hyde’s poetry as well as her own. In 1999 an edition of *The Book of Nadath*, edited by Leggott, was published. This project had occupied Leggott and Auckland University Press for some time, drawing on existing fragments of the long poem in manuscript and typescript, some in the Auckland University Library Collection, some held by Derek Challis. The editorial introduction to the reconstituted *Book* is as much an exposition of Leggott’s critical thinking as it is a guide to the text. The construction of textuality remains Leggott’s primary focus; like her own poems in *DIA*, she has assembled Nadath piece by piece from disparate locations. Here, however, she makes a necessarily
emphatic case for textual unity and the authority of her edition, which implicitly addresses the problem of the tension between discovery and construction that exists in ‘Opening the Archive’. The Book of Nadath, Leggott suggests, is best read not as a postmodern assemblage but as an act of historical retrieval:

If The Book of Nadath stretches over a good two-thirds of 1937, its manuscript tells the first part of the story. It is a powerful tool for reckoning up the beginning of Nadath, because for over half of the handwritten poem the narrative order is Hyde’s, and because 30 of those pages are written on Exquisite Bond, a paper she reserved for handwriting, and on which she drafted a number of the poems written at Whangaroa early in 1937. Considered alongside the northern ambience of ‘Nadath and the Master of Wheels’ (AU Ms #4) and ‘The House of Woman’ (AU Ms #5), the 30 pages of Exquisite Bond draw Nadath physically closer to Hyde’s three-week sojourn at Whangaroa in February 1937. A stack of paper or a writing pad may be carried from one place to another and used anywhere, but if that is the case it is still revealing that the poem follows in the settings of some of its sections Hyde’s own journeys in early 1937. (xiii)

In her introduction to The Book of Nadath, Leggott conditions Hyde’s extant manuscripts to form a publishable, analysable whole, as we see in her detailed case for the importance of the manuscript to the other material Hyde wrote in 1937: ‘the completion of The Godwits Fly at Whangaroa, the writing of A Home in This World at Waiatarua in March and the winter composition of Nor the Years Condemn at Castor Bay and Milford’ (xiii). In making a case for The Book of Nadath as ‘Hyde’s 1937 metatext’ (xiii), and as a metatext more generally for Hyde’s cultural times, Leggott returns to that staple of Hyde criticism, the writer’s biography. The ‘Introduction’ to her edition of
Nadath has a much stronger biographical element than ‘Opening the Archive’, providing, if not revelations, then new inferences about the young writer’s life.

In keeping with the tone of ‘Opening the Archive’, these inferences are tied up with female sexuality, in particular, the nature of Hyde’s relationship with her Avondale doctor, Gilbert Tothill. It is not so much the issue of the role of Hyde’s biography in considering her work that Leggott considers, but rather the question of which incidents in Hyde’s life should be subject to literary-critical probing, and for what purpose. The section in ‘Nadath Speaks to His Love’ where ‘Nadath hears the voice of the [lost] beloved issuing from his own lips, counselling peace, and decides not to let love go out of his heart’ (xvii) is linked by Leggott to a number of extant poems by Hyde: verses edited out of a 1937 poem whose expunged lines include ‘The guest is gone […] / Seen but set free, partaken and with-held, / And in this dream to last this day, Forever’ (xviii) and three short poems (including one placed by Rawlinson in Houses by the Sea as ‘The Miracle of Abundance’), whose evocations, suggests Leggott, provide ‘compounding senses of layered reality’ (xix), a reality whose constituent factors are loss and dream: ‘Yet I remembered not whose lips lay late upon / My eyes, nor felt the dark disturbed by my lover — / He that had been and passed […]’ (xx). The historical problem for Leggott is here the way in which Hyde has positioned her speakers; should we read these verses as biographical revelation or the projection of a wish? Leggott’s textual consideration of this concern is evocative and elliptical, chafing at the edges of euphemism as she attempts to
decipher the narrative intentions of a writer who once referred to her craft, squid-like, as ‘Squirting Ink’.

In ‘Opening the Archive’, Leggott identified the figures around whose loss Hyde constructs a number of narratives as Hyde’s first son, Robin, and her friend, Harry Sweetman. Here, her attribution is different, and not without controversy:

The person Hyde lost and who seems to stand at the back of these and other poems she wrote 1934-37 [including Nadath] is the doctor at Avondale who restored her health and self-esteem, Gilbert M. Tothill. [....] The Book of Nadath, the unpublished 1934 Autobiography and 1935 Journal and now the poetry archive itself make Gilbert Tothill unavoidable in Hyde’s post-1933 work. That she struggled with her feelings for him is in no doubt. That in her writing she turned him into a saviour, a healer whose counsel is always peace, is also apparent. (xxi)

Leggott in her introduction thus grapples with the oblique but identifiable causality that exists between Tothill and Hyde’s writing; Hyde’s relationship with Tothill is not merely a starting point for her literary thinking, but rather something that she ‘turned into’ the reveries and romances of her poetry. The question of whether there was any historical reality behind these reveries and romances, and what its nature might have been, is one Leggott here addresses in a similar manner to her consideration of Hyde and sexuality in ‘Opening the Archive’, by initiating a reading of the sexual signposts that Hyde’s poetry manuscripts offer up. Citing a letter from Hyde to ‘her Dunedin benefactor W. Downie Stewart and his sister (9 September 1937)’ (xxiii), Leggott argues of Hyde’s remark ‘I saw [Tothill] on Sunday last for the first time in months [...] he just arrived without notice’ that ‘[w]hat lay beneath the
cheery account of that day as Hyde describes it is the distance between what she called "spruce record" and manuscript poems with all their verses intact" (xxiii). Ultimately, Leggott’s analysis must end where it began, gesturing towards Hyde’s narrative games while at the same time highlighting the present inability of the critical community to answer the ‘did they or didn’t they’ curiosity that reading Nadath and other poems from this period necessarily piques.

In such gnomic sentences as ‘Great art in the balance with social transgression?’ (xix), Leggott mimics the way in which Hyde’s poems both gesture to and obscure the possibility of a reading that throws some biographical light on the dark days of Hyde’s 1937 subsistence and the bright lights of her writing at this time. Leggott nonetheless engages in a modicum of biographical attribution, claiming that ‘in her writing’ Hyde ‘turned [Tothill] into a saviour’ (xxi), but the rest, it seems, is silence: ‘Looked at autobiographically, the passage is a feat of mirror-imaging and gender reversals carried out with shifting pronouns worthy of a sick man’s (woman’s) vision’ (xxii).

Part of what makes Leggott’s analysis reflect in its composition the complexity of the questions she is addressing is the way in which her introduction is primarily grounded in a limited context: the writing and movements of Hyde herself. Leggott’s work on Hyde to date is thus characterised by a return to textuality through an epistemology which is still feminist but detached from the many historical referents which we see in
Bunkle et al. In this way, Hyde often reads as a construction of Leggott’s own literary imagination as a figure who shares, in another ‘feat of mirror-imaging’, the imaginative and creative concerns of Leggott herself. In this manner it is sometimes difficult, when reading Leggott’s criticism, to imagine the figure of Hyde as historically independent from Leggott’s literary imagination. Just as Leggott’s tendency to use sentence fragments to make her most emphatic assertions (‘The difference between cleverness and magic’ (1995, 269), ‘Destruction? Knowledge?’ (1999, xxxii)) reminds the reader of her vocation as a poet, Leggott’s own verses, in the ‘Blue Irises’ sequence, are infused with fragments of Hyde’s writing:

Leaf, leaf, how can I be sane enough
or mad enough to touch or leave untouched
what silence has to say? Had I your eyes
your eyes I loved this lifetime, wonder’s eyes
and the sun’s voice against the nights of eaten moons
would my oppressions be healed? Sometimes
fighting and dying are better than anything else
(‘Blue Irises’ 27, 1-7)31

Leaf, leaf, how can I be sane enough or mad enough to write to you—to touch or leave untouched—to say how much there is to say—or let silence have her shape? I don’t know, it is all so difficult. [...] Sometimes fighting and dying are better than anything else ... (Hyde to Rawlinson, 21 August 1939)

In The Book of Nadath, then, we see Leggott take a more conservative editorial position in order to focus attention on her particular interest in the relationship between Hyde and Tothill. This is a regression from her more postmodern, playful position in the complementary projects of DIA and ‘Opening the Archive’, but it cements Leggott’s scholarly authority
over her material in a manner that is at times surprisingly akin to Bertram. Though Leggott’s criticism is not, like Bertram’s, overdetermined, there remain few points of exit for the reader who seeks to find in it a Leggott outside of Hyde, or a Hyde outside of Leggott. Thus, the words Rawlinson cites as Hyde’s closing the door on her life become part of Leggott’s assembling of her own poetic and academic identity. While I do not presume to tell another critic how to do their job, it is important to note here that such a method is closed rather than open ended, in its epistemology at least. Despite Leggott’s assertion that ‘[t]here are always two versions’ (1999, xxxiv), the close and complex relationship between Hyde’s textual presence and her own suggest that sometimes, there is only one.

‘All in one at the last’: recent readings of Robin Hyde.

Scholars are not automatons, and despite the beguiling nature of Leggott’s Hydian univocality, it is possible to read and appreciate Leggott’s work on Hyde without being fully drawn into her critical orbit. The critic who demonstrates this is a friend and one-time colleague of Leggott’s, Mary Paul. Paul’s two chapters on Hyde in her critical volume Her Side of the Story adopt an explicitly revisionist, experimental approach, whose results approximate a new historicist reading of Robin Hyde in her times; an attempt to restore an historical and political context to Hyde’s writing. In ‘Robin Hyde: From Incoherence to Immersion’, Paul accounts for Robin Hyde criticism according to a two-camp model, examining the tensions and the
limits of the critical points of view espoused first by the cultural nationalists, then by the 1980s feminist retrievalists. Thus, Paul suggests of ‘The Dusky Hills’ (a poem which Leggott also analyses in ‘Opening the Archive’):

This is the kind of short poem that was seen as tripping easily off Hyde’s tongue and pen as if her facility were a liability. The theme of this poem is familiar — strength coming from the hills as in the biblical psalm — and her poem could therefore be seen as conventional in its ideas as well as its language. (131)

Paul then goes on to rehearse a feminist reading of the same text, similar to Leggott’s: ‘Conventional landscape imagery is reversed [...] The lines evoke the image of a baby’s head, gently tucked in against its mother and receiving its mother’s kiss, as well as a baby’s mouth tucked over her nipple. In these terms the images are unconventional and intense’ (141). Through this method, Paul attempts to restore to the text a sense of its existence over time: the several ways in which it has been interpreted and the way these interpretations have been contested. Similarly, she reminds us how

[James K.] Baxter found [Hyde’s] discourse very limited because [he felt] she dealt uneasily with the explicit aspects of her own material. He saw personal timidity and outworn feminine conventions of gentility getting in the way of the national and personal project which he regarded as needing more earthy openness, more sensuality. His position was close to that expounded by Curnow [...] (133)

Paul’s analysis of other critics is deliberately detached, withholding the kind of direct attack other writers such as Bunkle et al and Leggott have made on earlier commentators. Indeed, such is her ability at paraphrasing existing points of view that it is sometimes difficult to locate her
own authorial position. In this, and in initiating the process of constructing an historical framework for Robin Hyde criticism, Paul’s intentions are postmodern: to examine the critical heritage as a series of intersections between discourses. Thus, Paul attempts to reconstruct for the reader the assumptions behind the male orthodoxy which Leggott and Bunkle et al identified in their work, without taking the dialectical position implied by a strictly feminist response:

Once again we see a discourse of value (about what is modern or what is good writing) affiliated with a nationalist discourse. This has been done in several ways. In terms of the theme, the debate about New Zealand identity is valorised. It seems that there is a prescription that the writer needs to be obsessed with New Zealand to be driven to write well or break through to a kind of truthfulness. [...] For the new generation the idea of nation was creative because it was seen as a problem rather than a solution, so that restlessness combined with the struggle to express local and personal experience put a pressure on the individual that caused the kind of transformation that makes for good poetry. (134)

This detachment provides Paul with enough leverage to examine the tenets of feminist readings of Hyde in the same manner as she does the cultural nationalists. Thus, she notes that ‘[i]nstead of seeing Hyde as a victim of “booksy vulgarity” and “guided by impulses she barely understood”, she was seen as sharp and self-aware, highly conscious of the problems of being a woman and a writer’ (135). Paul’s concern here is over the way in which ‘[t]he “involved” feminist view reveals a wealth of ways in which female experience constructs the work but it tends to categorise the past in terms of the present. It has the effect of reinforcing gender oppositions by not
exploring their historically specific aspects’ (147). As I have shown above, this is a point of view with which I agree and on which I have attempted to expand in this chapter.

The consideration of ‘historically specific aspects [...] of generational experience’ is, as I have already noted, Paul’s point of departure from the existing tradition. Her chapter ‘Robin Hyde: A Political Reading’ attempts to fill in the critical blanks she has identified. Her project, which she acknowledges as experimental, is to reconstruct Hyde as a figure historically different from our own time, a writer whose focus was as much on internationalism as nationalism, and one whose feminism was indebted to that movement’s first wave. Thus, argues Paul, we may read Hyde as engaged in expressing the radical impulse of the period, to find a way to record the precise shape and texture of life as she knew it, particularly life lived differently than ever before. This is not to forget that collage and imagist methods were also used by writers central to the nationalist tradition [...]. But Hyde’s particular use is best understood by relating her to overseas writers with a strongly political—or what at the time was sometimes described as journalistic—emphasis. (157)

Paul finds in the American John Dos Passos a writer suitable for comparison with Hyde. Her subsequent analysis of Hyde’s feminism prioritises a point she considers is missing from early analyses: ‘There has not been a simple continuity (or even a progressive advance) in women’s lives from then to now’ (170). This assertion effectively deconstructs earlier feminist attempts, both by Bunkle et al and by Leggott, to encode their work and Hyde’s as part of a continuous, though chthonic, feminine tradition.
Through positing a view of women's history, and the history of women's writing, as discontinuous and internally divided, Paul relieves of their dialectical pressure those points at which Hyde's views seem so different from the present day:

Because of the depression of the 1930s and Hyde's own experience of both wage-earning and poverty, as well as of supporting a child, it seems that her primary concern was the economic inequality faced by women, where later feminists have stressed 'reproductive choice', often particularly choice not to have a child. It also seems as if she shared the common belief of her time that abortion was a sign of general social failure. A useful way of summing up her kind of 1930s feminism, as compared to the feminisms of earlier and later women, would be to say that for Hyde a woman needed not only the wherewithal to have 'a room of her own' (to think and write) but also the wherewithal to have (and be able to take care of) a baby of her own. (170)

These points of difference and distance which Paul introduces between Hyde's time and our own are an important contribution to the Robin Hyde critical tradition, as is the way in which Paul's prose is self-consciously reticent, making a case for authorial caution in a manner that lacks the pomposity demonstrated by Bertram in his exposition of his own uncertainties about Hyde. Paul's emphasis on the idea that '[e]vents have a different significance at different times and thus are treated in different ways by the people that they “happen to”' (178) is a timely redirection of the trajectory of feminist readings of Hyde. Such a historicisation of Hyde as different from, as well as similar to, women and writers in our own time, has a
rebound effect in that it reminds the reader that readings of Hyde are also historical and do not exist outside culture; not Leggott’s, not Paul’s, nor my own reading here. Hyde, Paul claims, is ‘interested, not so much in subjectivity for its own sake, but in sites where social ideologies and forces were busy playing out their effects. In the service of this I have already suggested Hyde blurs documentary, journalism and fiction so that her novels and poems spill out undefinably into the tide of “history”’ (157). My own analysis in this thesis is necessarily more textually based than Paul’s, since it deals with much material not so far discussed, and thus returns, as I have suggested in my introduction, to the notion of subjectivity, here presented in a reflexive relationship with writing itself. But Paul’s historical model has provided me with an important counter to the temptation of analytical flights-of-fancy; in many ways it is the ‘ballast’ for Robin Hyde criticism that McCormick claimed was absent from the ‘fantasy’ of Wednesday’s Children (1940, 176).

Paul’s chapters on Hyde thus not only relieve feminist readings of the writer of some of their dialectical tension, but also redirect the reader’s focus from the limitations of 1930s nationalism towards internationalism of the same period. Despite this redirection, the last word on cultural and literary nationalism’s connections to Robin Hyde had not yet been uttered. The release of Her Side of the Story in early 1999 was preceded late the previous
year by the published version of another PhD thesis. In this case, the volume was Stuart Murray's *Never a Soul at Home: New Zealand Literary Nationalism and the 1930s*, which included a chapter on the fiction of Robin Hyde.

Although Murray's principal interest is the 'literary nationalism' of his title, he is quick, like Paul, to emphasise the international character of this movement, constructing it as part of literary decolonisation the world over. Thus, the years leading up to the 1940 celebrations of the centenary of the signing of *Te Tiriti O Waitangi* are accounted for in international as well as national terms:

The context of falling prices and mass unemployment provided both a subject matter for a nascent nationalism, as well as the kind of national introspection that created a market for it. The 1932 Conference on Imperial Economics held at Ottawa dealt another blow to the national psyche, when Britain refused to place import quotas of foreign produce in order to favour goods from the Dominion. (21)

Murray also considers New Zealand writers in an international context: his chapter on John Mulgan is called 'Oxford Man' and considers the writer-publisher's literary relationship with W. H. Auden, among other writers, while his chapter on Allen Curnow classes him somewhat unusually as one whose 'role within the founding of a national literature, and his importance as an articulator of a culture of difference places him alongside figures such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon' (221). Thus distinguishing himself as surely the only writer to have
compared Curnow with Fanon, Murray reads Hyde in a way that is at times similarly outside the contemporary critical debate. Although he cites Leggott, Boddy & Matthews and Bunkle et al, Murray is primarily concerned with earlier assessments of Hyde’s writing, placing her work in dialogue with that of her contemporaries. One of his most important assertions in this regard is that ‘nearly all of the personal attacks on Hyde during the decade [that is, the 1930s] deployed a criticism that frequently sought to foreground the issue of her gender or her body in some way’ (168). Coming from a critical standpoint that is outside feminism, though sympathetic to it, this insight is a useful subject rhyme with the feminists’ concerns (although Murray also remarks, dryly, that ‘Noting this exclusion [of Hyde] has become a feature of recent literary history in New Zealand’ (167)).

Murray’s overall position in the Robin Hyde critical tradition is best understood as responsive to, though outside, feminist readings; indeed, it seems appropriate to place him alongside Rawlinson, Challis and Sandbrook. Challis himself liked Murray and gave him access to his own collection of Robin Hyde manuscripts, which enabled Murray to consider, in his chapter on Hyde, Hyde’s unpublished novel ‘The Unbelievers’. Murray locates this text as an important precursor of Wednesday’s Children ‘[i]n terms of narrative method, characterization, and thematic unity’ (185). There is an irony here between Murray’s access to a ‘complete’ manuscript for the purposes of analytical comparison, and Leggott’s attempts to reconstruct The Book of Nadath for the same purpose; the latter’s editorial comment that
‘[t]here are always two versions’ (xxxiv) makes clear the problematic nature of the idea of completion in relation to Robin Hyde manuscripts.

For my purposes though, it is important to see Murray as someone working in the critical tradition which stems from Rawlinson, based on access to private manuscripts through personal connection (in this case, Murray to Challis) and having as a core part of his analysis material not normally available to scholars. Murray attempts to use this privilege wisely, making only modest claims for the manuscript’s place in Hyde’s œuvre: ‘As much as anything else, such a process is testament to her sense of craft’ (185). His primary interest remains in Wednesday’s Children, which he calls ‘Hyde’s most intelligent novel’ (187). His volume is also the first to consider without immediate dismissal Hyde’s first prose volume, Journalalese. Murray’s assertion that, ‘[t]aken as a whole,’

Journalalese betrays the structural problems that affected Hyde in all her prose works. The shifting tone and the stylistic changes portray a fundamental uncertainty about the authorial position. The book reads as a compromise, conscious of both a potential market and of fidelity to the seriousness of its subject matters. Hyde was uneasy about the literary climate and its demands, and worried about the necessity to tailor her output to an audience. (172)

Although this is an improvement on Joan Stevens’s assertion that Journalalese is ‘is in poor taste, and without literary merit’ (1965, 52), the reservations that Murray here expresses about aspects of Hyde’s writing (elsewhere he suggests, for example, that ‘Hyde’s success at subverting the conventional romantic ending [in Wednesday’s Children] reveals exactly the
kind of generic flexibility missing from Check to Your King' ([186]) are closer in spirit to Rawlinson’s 1970 introduction to The Godwits Fly, or her essay on the same novel which appear in Hankin’s 1976 collection, than to the ideas of Leggott or Paul. This concordance with earlier points of view can be interpreted as signalling, as Paul does more explicitly, the limits of the feminist methodologies, but it also reminds the reader once more of what Leggott might call ‘the persistence of record’: the continuing work of Challis and the late Rawlinson to preserve the details and materials of Hyde’s life and writing in a manner than blends personal fidelity to the memory of Robin Hyde with sustainable scholarly praxis.

This, then, is my account of the Hydian critical tradition, of which I hope this thesis will soon become a part. The conclusion of the projects concerned with Hyde’s literary subjectivity which have been initiated or continued under the auspices of the Marsden Fund means that the possibilities for Robin Hyde criticism continue to expand and diversify. Whether the release of the Rawlinson-Challis biography of Hyde will quell or intensify critical and general interests in the myriad details of her life remains to be seen, as does the question of what final form the Robin Hyde Collected Poems Project will take. Indeed, ‘final’ is an inapposite word to use for any research concerned with the writing of Robin Hyde, since, as this thesis will show, any detailed exploration of her work, whether small or large in scale, will inevitably raise as many questions as it reveals. Thus, though I make strong claims for the authority of my conclusions in the following chapters, I
accept also that for the Hydian critical tradition they can only function as a stopping place, a stimulus to the thinking of other readers and critics of Robin Hyde. I must acknowledge therefore, that though my thesis proclaims itself ‘A New Poetics of Robin Hyde’, it will best serve the cause of reading Hyde’s writing if it is understood as an exposition of yet another analytical method, as hybrid, compromised and ‘cobbled-up’ (183), to use Bertram’s term, as all the analytical methods I have discussed above.
I discussed further the influence of F. R. Leavis on McCormick’s thinking, and thus on New Zealand literary criticism more generally, in a seminar entitled ‘After Robin Hyde: F.R. Leavis and New Zealand cultural nationalism’ given at ‘Time and Space: The Annual Conference of Thesis Writers’, Department of English, University of Canterbury, 19 October 1999.

M. H. Holcroft’s essay ‘The Deepening Stream: Cultural Influences in New Zealand’ won the essay section of the Centennial Literary competition, while Allen Curnow’s poem ‘Landfall in Unknown Seas’ was set to music by Douglas Lilburn to mark in 1942 the tercentenary of Tasman’s brief arrival in New Zealand. Additionally, Frank Sargeson won the Centennial short-story competition in 1940 with ‘The Making of a New Zealander’. For further discussion of the cultural significance of the centennial, see Murray, chapter one (20-47).

Murray’s volume Never a Soul at Home takes as its subtitle New Zealand Literary Nationalism and the 1930s, while Patrick Evans in The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature coins the phrase ‘the Phoenix Generation’ (76) to describe the young nation-builders of the 1930s. Elsie Locke’s memoir, Student at the Gates, includes her experiences as one of the few female members of this ‘Phoenix generation’, while Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews in their ‘Commentary’ published with the 1986 reprint of Hyde’s Nor the Years Condemn, argue that ‘[m]iddle-class male writers have defined the problems encountered by writers in this society […]’ (268). Michele Leggott in ‘Opening the Archive’ argues that Hyde herself ‘disliked the scapegoating of feminine consciousness which accompanied the installation of these [stylistic] values in a national literature’ (272).

I am grateful to Mary Paul for informing me of this.

A detailed account of Gloria Rawlinson’s treatment of Robin Hyde’s letters from China, along with her editing of Hyde’s China poems, will be provided by Derek Challis in his forthcoming biography of Hyde.

Typically, Glover’s aphorism may also be self-directed, evoking his own advanced, and by now public, decline into alcoholism. He, as much as Rawlinson, can be read as ‘the dead’ looking after ‘the dead’.

See Leggott 1999, 85-87, for an account of the proposed second volume.

The 101 letters from Robin Hyde, written to Schroder between September 1927 and April 1939, form the collection ‘Letters from Robin Hyde’ in the Alexander Turnbull Library, Ms-Papers-0280 -03, -04, -05, -06 and -07.

This is a phrase from Alice Munro’s Lives of Girls and Women, whose narrator Del calls the heroine’s death in Bizet’s Carmen ‘Carmen’s surrender to the final importance of gesture, image, self-created self’ (181).
Hyde was refused permission to publish on this topic, as she wrote to the Mitchell Librarian, Ida Leeson: ‘[W]hen I got there, the Hocken Library Committee absolutely refused to cooperate in any way. They said I could read there, but held a special and very solemn meeting, and agreed that under no circumstances must I publish or quote from anything read whilst in their bosom—so, of course, research work was, from the writing point of view, quite impossible’ (28 April 1937). Despite this, Hyde inscribed a manuscript of her poem ‘Arangi-Ma’: ‘For the Hocken Library Committee, as a very small return for their courtesy and consideration to a stranger’ (20 October 1936). Markham’s manuscript was later edited by E. H. McCormick and published by the Alexander Turnbull Library as *New Zealand or Recollections Of It* in 1963.

Rawlinson is here incorrect: Markham visited the Hokianga and the Bay of Islands in 1834 and wrote his journal at home in England in 1835.

I have quoted part of McCormick’s analysis of *Check to Your King* earlier in this introduction; further to that (and similar to Bertram) is his claim that ‘The book is not flawless—Robin Hyde was no Nathaniel Hawthorne—and here and there she digressed into irrelevant bypaths or inserted passages that would have been more appropriate in a guidebook or in a *chronique scandaleuse* of New Zealand’s founders […] In spite of such flaws, the past comes to life as it rarely does in the work of professional historians and as it has done in no other New Zealand novel’ (176-7).

It is ironic that Bertram also describes *The Godwits Fly* as ‘cobbled up’ (183) in its ending, given that it reflects, more than any of her other novels, Hyde’s actual experience.

Like Bertram, McCormick had also known Hyde personally. The two met while they were secondary school students; Boddy relates how Hyde ‘shocked’ McCormick, at this time, by smoking on a ferry trip home to Wellington from Day’s Bay (1991, 14).

Bertram’s position is ironic, given that ‘Houses by the Sea’ is redolent with images and evocations of sexuality, both nascent and inherent. See Leggott, 1995.

See note 8.

Rawlinson is referring here to Hyde’s sabbatical in Dunedin, October-November 1936. See note eleven for an account of one of Hyde’s ‘Dunedin poems’.

Hyde, ‘Mountainy Water’ (AU 465.2), line 2, 10.

Hankin however stuck to her point of view; see her 1978 *Landfall* article, ‘Realism, Nationalism and the Double Scale of Values in the Criticism of New Zealand Fiction’, for another example of her critical position, which remains even at this later date engaged by the cultural debates of the 1950s and 60s about the merit of New Zealand literary criticism.

The anthology included women of the same generation as Rawlinson, such as Mary Stanley, Ruth Gilbert and Lauris Edmond, as well as other, younger writers including Anne French, Jan Kemp, Fiona Kidman, Rachel McAlpine and Elizabeth Smither. Ruth Dallas and Janet Frame declined permission to publish their work; Ensing relates how Frame ‘asked if a companion volume of New Zealand male poets was envisaged’, while Dallas argued that “‘poetry should stand or fall on its own merits; and whether it is written by women or men seems to me to be irrelevant’” (10).

Riemke Ensing in 1995 edited a cross-career selection of Rawlinson’s poetry, entitled *Gloria in Excelsis* and intended as a tribute by Ensing to her friend and adopted poetical foremother.
24 My selection of writers is not made glibly: feminist academic theses written during the late 1980s focused on combinations of the above writers, as I shall discuss.

25 Spiral became the most visible of these collectives, publishing in 1983 a collection of stories by J. C. Sturm, *The House of the Talking Cat*, and the ground-breaking novel *the bone people*, by Keri Hulme. Both volumes were acclaimed by the wider literary community, establishing Sturm as a public figure separate from her late husband James K. Baxter and bringing Hulme international renown when her volume won the 1985 Booker-McConnell prize.

26 Although *Dragon Rampant* received only one print run, reprints of the two novels were subsequently made by the University of Otago press, while Auckland University Press continued to reprint *The Godwits Fly* and *Passport to Hell*, which was reprinted with an introduction by D. I. B. Smith in 1986. Lydia Wevers edited a *Selected Poems* of Robin Hyde for Oxford University Press, which was published in 1984.

27 This argument is Mary Paul's; I will discuss her work on Robin Hyde later in this chapter.

28 This followed on from Bridget Armstrong’s solo dramatic work about Hyde, *The Flight of the Godwit*, which drew heavily on Hyde’s writings and played in various New Zealand centres in 1982, to generally positive reviews.

29 Bunkle was well-known in the late 1980s for co-authoring, with Sandra Coney, an article for *Metro* magazine (1 June 1987) exposing unsafe experimental practices in the treatment of cervical cancer at National Women’s Hospital.

30 In the film, the name ‘Simone’ is used for Hyde’s friend Gwen Hawthorn; ‘Simone’ is also the name of Gwen’s persona in *The Godwits Fly*.

31 Bunkle *et al*’s citation of the ‘Amazonian eloquence’ Lawlor attributes to Hyde needs to be qualified by Gloria Rawlinson’s opinion, which is almost diametrically opposed to Lawlor’s. To Schroder, she wrote:

> He [Pat Lawlor] has the weirdest ideas of Iris—wanted me to put in a bit about her fine speechmaking. This is a laugh! She spoke at a political meeting when she was eighteen, but there was really nothing in it. She spoke at the Auckland University Literary Club, and went on for so long that everyone missed trams boats etc. and the next week when it was my turn the chairman implored me to make it short as Robin Hyde had wearied them to death. At Author’s week she was a complete washout although her material was good & anyone else could have made a fine speech out of it. Also in China she spoke so long as an unofficial delegate from N.Z. that official U.S.A. delegate Furno refused to make his speech which followed as there was not time. (27 January 1948)

32 This, of course, is a false unity. Hyde’s correspondence with Schroder and various other New Zealanders is held in the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. While Hyde’s poetry manuscripts, catalogued by Rawlinson, were held in the Auckland University Library, and her letters to John A. Lee in the Auckland Public Library (now the Auckland Central City Library), in the 1970s and early 1980s, almost all Hyde’s other manuscripts were held by Derek Challis or Gloria Rawlinson. Access to the knowledge Bunkle *et al* present as the norm was thus subject to restriction which their interest eventually served to consolidate.
We may posit that Hyde was with Mitcalfe on this issue; in her 1935 ‘Journal’, she wrote: ‘I am most certainly not a lesbian’ (55), a condition which she calls, in accordance with the technical jargon of her times, ‘sexual perversion’ (55).

The writers implicated here are not only those who responded directly to Hyde’s writing, such as McCormick and Bertram, but those who in literary and cultural criticism, as well as their private correspondence, attempted to set the tone of the times: Allen Curnow, Denis Glover, A. R. D. Fairburn and even Frank Sargeson.

The writers’ emphasis here is perhaps a little dramatic; Hyde certainly lived in misery and at times in poverty too when she was in Sydney, but her time of eating only mandarins to survive is recorded, both in The Godwits Fly and her private autobiographical writing, as relatively limited in duration, not for the whole of her pregnancy.

For example, The Godwits Fly was a set text in Stage One New Zealand Literature at the University of Canterbury in 1994, while Michele Leggott began teaching a postgraduate course on Hyde, read alongside other women poets (such as H. D.), at the University of Auckland from about the same date.

Hyde, ‘Outnumbered’ (AU 80.2), line 5.

Leggott, in her introduction to The Book of Nadath, describes how Hyde indicated in her 1935 ‘Journal’ that her 1934 ‘Autobiography’ notebook should go to Tothill in the event of her death. ‘It is not clear when Tothill acquired the manuscript autobiography’, Leggott writes (xx); in any event it was in his possession prior to 1964, when Tothill retired from psychiatry and gave the volume to the Auckland Public Library. A typescript transcription by Rawlinson of Hyde’s 1935 ‘Journal’ was also eventually deposited at the same location; the original of this volume remains in the Challis Collection (Leggott 1999, 88).

Challis describes in his own words how

in 1962, he [Challis] passed to Mr Sandall, the Auckland University Librarian, a substantial part of the collection, including the manuscripts and drafts of much of the published prose and the great bulk of the published poetry. He retained in his own possession much of the more personal material, including holographs of poems, private journals, poetry fair copy books, letters and unpublished material such as short stories and the several manuscripts of the unpublished novel, ‘The Unbelievers’. (JNZL, 29-30)

Mary Paul tells us in the footnotes to her discussion of Robin Hyde that ‘A Night of Hell’ was added to the volume at the publisher’s request (note 59, 200).

Mary Paul attributes Blackwood Paul’s refusal of the manuscript to Challis’s feeling ‘unable [in the 1960s] to provide the suggested sizeable introduction because of his commitment with Gloria Rawlinson to a biography. Subsequently Challis was approached by Phoebe Meikle (former editor for Paul’s), who had apparently kept a copy of the manuscript, and John Barnett of Longman Paul’ (note 59, 200). See also Challis in the JNZL, in which he cites a letter from Gloria Rawlinson to Gwen Mitcalfe, in which the former claims that ‘[T]his narrative [eventually published as A Home in this World] contains some of the best writing Iris ever did and at least one publisher [Blackwood Paul] ... wanted to publish it as it stood plus a short biographical introduction. However Derek decided against this’ (30-1).
42 A Home in this World was, for example, the first of Robin Hyde’s texts to catch the attention of Michele Leggott, who subsequently became a pre-eminent Robin Hyde scholar. She has since described it as ‘the book that broke my heart’ and stimulated her interest in Hyde’s poetry (Leggott, ’The Robin Hyde Collected Poems Project’, 5 September 1999, in ‘Sargeson, Hyde, and the Beginnings of New Zealand Fiction: A Conference in Honour of Lawrence Jones’).

43 I take this information from Mary Paul, p.146, note 95.

44 I am using an ampersand to conjoin Boddy & Matthews in order to distinguish their research from the collaborative essays of Bunkle, Hardy and Matthews (Bunkle et al).

45 The losses made by both Journailese and Disputed Ground were mentioned by Derek Challis at ‘Sargeson, Hyde, and the Beginnings of New Zealand Fiction: A Conference in Honour of Lawrence Jones’, 5 September 1999. This author bought her copy of Disputed Ground new from Unity Books, Willis Street, Wellington, in August 1997; it was not the only copy on the shelf.

46 Hyde, ‘Star Change’ (AU 369), lines 1-2.

47 This is the term Evans uses to highlight the contrasts between the concerns of women poets and of the male cultural nationalists, in his introduction to New Zealand poetry, Engl 105 New Zealand Literature I, University of Canterbury.

48 This methodological tension has also been identified by Mary Paul, whose argument I discuss later in this chapter.

49 Leggott’s DIA (1994) was followed by another volume, As Far As I Can See, in 1999, in which she turns the majority of her imaginative attention away from Robin Hyde and to the troubling experience of her own failing eyesight.

50 See Boddy & Matthews, p.145.

51 Lines 3-4 (‘Had I your eyes / your eyes I loved this lifetime’) recall the opening of Hyde’s poem ‘The Sword’, published in Houses by the Sea (‘Had I a sword, a sword I had loved this lifetime’ [1-2]), with Leggott making a pun on Hyde, Iris, as ‘eyes’.

52 Similarly, Leggott concluded her presentation on ‘The Robin Hyde Collected Poems Project’ (5 September 1999, in ‘Sargeson, Hyde, and the Beginnings of New Zealand Fiction: A Conference in Honour of Lawrence Jones’) with a reading of ‘Arachne’, a manuscript poem (held in the Challis Collection) which Leggott dated as probably the last poem Hyde wrote before her death.

53 Hyde, ‘Two Eggs’ (AU 559), line 30.

54 The manuscript is not strictly complete, suggests Murray, in the sense that it ‘was never reworked for publication in any meaningful way. Its fragmentary, episodic nature means that the novel lacks any form of discernible narrative, and there are no real themes or motifs that work through the text as a whole’ (184).
'What the Chaldean knew, this monarch knows': Robin Hyde’s heretical poetics.¹

Am I a blasphemer, or do I hold the world in these
two hands? (*A Home in this World*, 38)

Say, I had whiled an idle hour
With ghosts of what has never been—
The silver hind, the sorcerer’s flower,
The breasts of the immortal Queen. (* Spoil*, 21-4)

We have seen in Chapter 1 how all critical considerations of Hyde have
defined her writing as the product of difference. My aim in this chapter is to
add my own voice to this chain of critics, and to redirect, once again, the
content of the critical focus of the Hydian tradition. My intention here is to
explore Hyde’s textual position in her early and middle poetry through the
concept of the heretic.

The idea of heresy is important to Hyde’s poetry because it
denotes a rebellion which occurs against a tradition from within that tradition.
Hyde in much of her writing is concerned to understand the way her feminine
subjectivity is both conditioned by, and different from, the culture and
traditions she finds herself in. At the same time, she seeks to devise a poetics
which interrogates those traditions. This she achieves in two ways: through
narratorial revising of the received Christian tradition, and, most importantly,
through infusing her poems with images and voices whose historical
antecedent is the heresy of Gnosticism, an early recasting of Christianity
which was predicated on hidden knowledge imparted in secret and, ultimately, the Gnostic’s withdrawal into silence. Through an analysis of Hyde’s revision in her poetical narratives of the Christian tradition and her adoption of the Gnostic trace, I hope that Hyde’s archaic and religious narratives may be relieved of their ‘difficult’ label, and thus be viewed anew as substantial textual foundations for her later poetics.

‘Why has it gone amiss / Ask of thy heart’: Hyde and the community of Christ.

In Robin Hyde’s early and middle poetry, the Christian tradition is a narrative within which her poetical speakers are located, from where they do not hesitate to take on the whole fabric of Christian history, asserting, on Hyde’s behalf, that there is an interpretative place for her at the heart of the tradition. Thus, the speaker in ‘Defence of Christ’, the first of Hyde’s religious poems published in The Conquerors, is not merely a commentator, but Hyde-as-Christ, rerouting the trajectory of Christianity and using the language of the Authorised Version to do it:

Lo, it is I ... in many a street dim-litten,
Tattered with shadows, I have called your names
(Forgetting none, oh fisherman, soldier of Rome,
Though it were far from the Galilean foam
And the laden nets ye turned to a fairytale),
But who would know, in those hurrying dusks wind-bitten,
An old man spent and poor.
Warming his twisted hands at the brazier flames,
A child in a ragged dress,
A harlot, thrust away from the tavern door?
(Where was your cloak, to cover her nakedness?)
Faint words beat on the wind—‘Lo, it is I.’
Was it nothing unto you, all ye that passed by? (1-13)

Hyde’s narrative position here is both radical and heretical. There is a spiritual manifesto in her poetical consideration of Christianity which is expressed in the opening lines of ‘Defence of Christ’: to disavow and indeed destroy tradition, to make an imaginative return to the original Christ-as-human, and to explore, through re-imagining that historical moment, the compassion and practical care Hyde believes are necessary to a true Christian conduct, and without which those whose thoughts or actions express dissent cannot be included. Hyde’s reading of Christianity seeks to make a place for the heretic, calling for a radical inclusiveness in which society’s spiritual health is contingent on none being excluded. If Christianity motivates no such compassion, Hyde contends, then there is no resurrection, not in Christ’s time, nor ever:

So loose the ancient bloodlust on earth again
And drive me out of the world. I was not made
For the weaponed man, for the proud and perfect blade,
For the lip unshaken of pain;
But for the coward suddenly unafraid
Facing the wild beast’s spring, to laugh as he fell;
For the woman with shame like a stone behind her eyes
Who wept, when I bad her arise
And fear not man upon earth nor devil in Hell.
A cripple was mine, and a thief who smiled on the cross ...
Such is your loss.
Leave my body at Nazareth now to rot
While the name of Christ upon earth is remembered not. (34-46)

It is not only this notion of a failed tradition needing an exhaustive reimagining that marks Hyde as a heretic; as a woman presuming to speak for
Christ she disrupts all the hierarchies of traditional Christian thought, from Augustine and Aquinas to her present day. Her list of outcasts, though standard enough in the poem's first stanza (the old man and the young child in poverty, the homeless prostitute), expands by the end of poem to include states of being which are as much emotional as physical and which include, implicitly, her own experience. The 'woman with shame like a stone behind her eyes' (40) is not only Magdalen or the unnamed woman, taken in adultery, of the gospels, but also Hyde herself, and other women like her, whose personal conduct has transgressed the standards of the day. In one line Hyde evokes a whole gendered history of abuse, almost all of it religiously-motivated. So sure is Hyde of the need for a radical overturning of traditional understanding that she is willing to take on the personae of the figures at the heart of this tradition in order to radicalise it.

'And yet without me, oh God, how will you find life?': Hyde and God the Father.

In Hyde's Christian poems, a new narrative is proffered in place of the exhausted tradition. Her speakers stand as close to the canonical teachings as they can, in order to throw new light on ancient material. It is a poetical battle for the heart of culture, sincerely undertaken and passionately meant, and one which ultimately leads to a rejection, on Hyde's part, of the idea of a loving Father God. Thus, in the unpublished poem 'The Faithful' (AU 462), written after October 1936, the outcasts that Hyde evokes in 'Defence of Christ' are now depicted as stray dogs; the most wretched, but with the greatest capacity
for righteous devotion. Hyde demands that God

[...] spare an instant’s thought for these
Who have no psalm wherewith to please,

Whose speech is whimper, and unwise
Devotion, and hot grateful eyes,

A mute tongue licking at the hand
Too crafty-skilled to understand,

And a faith fixed on lords above
The single-heartedness of love [...] (7-14)

In ‘Defence of Christ’, Hyde asserted that if there is not universal compassion and practical help, then there is no resurrection. In ‘The Faithful’, God is ‘Far God’ (1), the one ‘who vivisected’ (29) humanity in the moment of its creation and who, the speaker claims, must take responsibility for its condition. Hyde’s religious poems allow for no Holy Trinity; her God is at best a disinterested creator and at worst guilty of filicide. Thus, an important component of Hyde’s heretical enterprise, by which she devises a workable femininity, is the effort to reduce the scale and influence of God the Father, the one who in ‘The Faithful’ ‘[f]orget[s] how since this earth began / God’s sole proprietor was man’ (3-4).

There are a number of poems in which Hyde explores this position in part, but the fullest plotting of Hyde’s ideas occurs in two: ‘Unto His Maker’ (AU 137.5), an unpublished poem written between 1930 and 1935, and ‘In Darkness’, from The Conquerors. In ‘Unto His Maker’, the speaker brusquely, and indeed brashly, declares

But this you could not know. The grotesque limbs
You heaped together, as in mockery,
Dull eyes, usurping godhead's right to see
What purple wine your flagonned twilight brims ---
Maimed giant hands --- these were not all of me. (1-5)

This poem functions as the subject's declaration of its anteriority, its partiality, its otherness to God, on a basis other than that of sin. In this poem, the speaker effectively demands that God acknowledge the subject's independence, its differentiated state. Here, sentience confers separateness:

'Whatever stands one instant on this earth, / Dazed by the lapping flowers, the swirl of stars, / Wins right to challenge your insentient bars' (6-8).

Though love and compassion are the hallmarks of Hyde's Christ, here, it is the potential for, and the experience of, love which makes the subject other to, and more than, God its maker. The prison of existence is in 'Unto His Maker' recognised but not liberated. The move towards this comes, according to Hyde's schema, by reducing the scope and scale of God until a new integration between God, nature and the individual is reached, in which all are one in a state of beneficial interdependence. Once again, the instigator of this is the human, and feminine, subject, who in the poem 'In Darkness' thinks her way to revelation:

Lying awake in the dark
I have suddenly thought
(At the clasp of unseen fingers under my head),
'God is no more
Than any apple-bough, then,
Where the birds of the air have nest—
Than the little, hardly-sought
Home of the field-mouse, high in the tawny grain,
Where the spoiler looks in vain;
Than the lowly earthen door
Where the vixen runs to hide, as the bold hunt passes
In flurry of blood-red music and blood-crazed men;
Than the bending meadow grasses
Under the breast of the lark.’ (1-14)

The animals that seek shelter and protection in this stanza are all female; domesticated, Anglicized versions of the harlot thrown out of the tavern in ‘Defence of Christ’. Her speaker goes on to describe the galaxies; yet these function only as the inverse of human and animal needs which are always immediate and always to hand. Thus, though ‘God is no less / Than any galaxy, then—’ (28-9), even the nature of God among these galaxies is conditioned by human perception: ‘Than the farthest palace of dreams / Built for the longing of men’ (30-1).

For Hyde, Christianity’s God the Father is inadequate to meet what she perceives as the most pressing needs of her society. This sense of spiritual lack is, as we see in the poems discussed above, something she conceives as a theological problem: God’s failure to make nurture inherent in the relationship between the Creator and humanity, leaving humanity to try and create this nurture, falteringly and imperfectly, one to another. Although, Hyde suggests, the relationship between God and humanity might have been restored through Christ, the community’s response over time to the gospel narrative has been to exclude rather than include society’s most vulnerable people: the poor and loathsome, the sexually transgressive. This situation is desperate enough to negate the truth of the resurrection. We see then that Hyde’s position is predicated on a contradiction, which she herself
acknowledged in her 1934 'Autobiography', written for her psychiatrist, Tothill, at Avondale:

But no: I think I can manage without God. Like Olive Schreiner, I love Christ but I hate God. So you can judge, who do not bother with superstitions, how much chance I have—you and the gardening shears and the phloxes. I told you I nearly ran to Mother Church, when away from here. Not quite—it was here, instead. (11)

In A Home in this World, Hyde considers again what her theological position means. Although she notes that 'I have always loved many of the people in the Bible, whether with oddly-distorted snivelling stained-glass faces they stare out over my head, in robes of deep scarlet and blue, or whether they are merely an old remembered phrase, a comforting hand of wood' (37), she reiterates her rejection of God the Father, who, she argues, achieves existence 'not only through the articulate, but through all, woman and beast, bird and plant, who suffer the growth and bear the pangs' (38). Hyde's words to Tothill in her 'Autobiography'—that 'you can judge [...] how much chance I have' (11)—show her awareness of the problematic position her beliefs put her in, both culturally and spiritually. Without any affiliation to God the Father, she cannot look to any Christian congregation for support and is alienated from the position of more orthodox believers, yet her continuing love for biblical narratives, and her belief, evident in 'Defence of Christ', in the continuing potential in these narratives for social and spiritual transformation, mean that her imaginative vision has nothing to say to the conventions of disaffected unbelief. Hyde's rejection of God but not Christ is a strange
heresy, an inversion of received wisdoms both Christian and atheist. Thus, the poetry it gives rise to is intriguing and highly original. Without God, the biblical narratives that Hyde responds to and elaborates on are emptied of their oppressive, patriarchal power, the burden of which Hyde has shifted on to the historical Church, which is the home of God the Father who does not exist. Thus, in Hyde’s poems concerned with biblical figures, there is a freedom of thought and an elaboration of narrative not normally associated with such canonically-fixed characters. No longer under the control of the Father, Hyde’s holy men and women are open to unorthodox scrutiny, in which Hyde shows herself variously skeptical, subversive and empathetic.

‘[...] Magdalen all bruised of grace / Or Judas with a hangdog face’: Hyde’s biblical narratives.

Hyde in her religious poems is interested in the interaction of the different figures of the Christian, and pre-Christian, narrative. She continually revisits biblical stories, re-examining content in order to re-orient meaning, always working to open up new possibilities for understanding. Thus, in ‘Ruth’ (AU 475.2), an unpublished poem from 1936, Hyde brings to the fore the sensual undertones of the original Old Testament narrative, in which Ruth, the young Moabite widow living in Bethlehem with her Judaean mother-in-law, becomes the wife of their middle-aged protector Boaz. In Hyde’s poem, Boaz speaks, after his marriage, of how

Rising betimes, the foreign woman shews
Her still establishment on all we touch,
Pours out the oil and sieves the meal for bread,
Breaks fare for pilgrims, but not overmuch ...
Scarce more than that gleaned handful of the yields
That held her, thin and sunburnt, in my fields. (1-6)

Yet it is clear that, despite Ruth's complete adoption of the culture of her relatives in-law, she remains privately unacculturated, a solitary subject who functions here as a symbol of femininity, in which being foreign is the same as being a woman, and the closeness of lovers is illusory. Hyde's Boaz has the wisdom to accept this, however reluctantly. Thus, though 'Only Boaz knows / Of the first hour she wakes, and at his side / Dreams, a dark city and unoccupied' (16-18), he also knows that his wife's sensuality is made of more than her marriage, more than the merely material:

[...] Her mouth is ripe and heavy,
Her throat flung back for an unseen carouse
As one who pays a mutinous sweet levy
To tithe-men of a dream loved long ago.
Swift waves of breathing break her bosom's calm,
And upward stream, thin-flamed from either palm,
The grey and golden woods, the tapering green
Wind-argument of pines I have not seen.
Sedges of fiery lakes prick down my skies,
Smoke on strange hills coils smarting in my eyes,
Wounded I lie with lands I cannot know. (20-30)

Ruth is the mother of Obed, who will be the grandfather of King David and ancestor, through Joseph the husband of Mary, of Christ; she is thus traditionally associated with the Old Testament kingdoms and the Holy Family of the New Testament. Yet Hyde's Ruth, in her self-knowing, independent sensuality, is close, in her erotic character at least, to Hyde's Mary Magdalen, the prostitute who gave up her profession to follow Christ
and who is traditionally one of the women Christ appeared to after his death. Hyde’s insistence, in poems such as ‘Defence of Christ’, that the impoverished harlot must be included among the company of heaven, is complementary to her poetical interest in Magdalen, whom she addresses in ‘Street Scene’, published in *Houses by the Sea*. Here, Hyde constructs Magdalen as a mother-lover, whose grim and difficult work gives her an insight into the structure of society and the condition of human emotions that, Hyde implies, is invaluable to her subsequent status as a Christian saint. In ‘Street Scene’, it is Magdalen, not the unnamed Christ, who redeems fallen humanity by her love and compassion:

But Magdalen, before that, were there days
Sharp-focussed in a sun too cruelly pale,
When you in shoddy streets watched them go by,
Felt their grey stone grow phallic through your flesh,
Fixed the full compass of their miseries?
When you, with red cloak spread against the wind,
Knew by each sense the ordure of the city,
The spittle of the many generations,
The purulent flower, rotting from its birth,
And over all a pale sky arched like dreams? (1-10)

These remarkable images of antiquity and decay make Magdalen a spiritual custodian of many generations. Indeed, it is the miseries of this scene and Magdalen’s detailed knowledge of them that make her a redemptive figure, her hard-heartedness towards her client disguising her compassion for her culture. Magdalen’s joyless sacrifice both anticipates and makes redundant Christ’s martyrdom; this, once again, is a highly heretical assertion on Hyde’s part, in which the necessary care for humanity that prompts
Christ's mission is already inherent in Magdalen's difficult work. But Hyde is very clear that it is not in order to elevate prostitution that she has Magdalen 'drawing tight [her] cloak' to 'whisper "Mine"' (31). If anything, it is to remind the reader that sacrifice and redemption, for women and especially for fallen women, are acts of daily necessity, acts of spiritual preservation that protect them from '[t]he carrion house' (21):

And choose out one, but not for your rejoicing;
And lead him quietly to the steep-staired room,
Setting his mouth to wine and silken stuff,
Indifferent to his worth, and to his quest
A windless valley. You, without desire,
Could fold your limbs about the race like trees,
And let its tears run down between your breasts. (32-8)

An important part of Hyde's re-imagining of the Christian narrative, as set down in 'Defence of Christ' and played out in 'Street Scene', is the rehabilitation of those figures marginal to the narrative of redemption. Thus, Magdalen's way of life prior to meeting Christ is validated and indeed revealed as essential to the saint she later became. Hyde does similar work on the New Testament's seminal lost one, Judas, the betrayer of Christ. Hyde's Judas is never cast out, but forgiven and reunited with Christ, who still loves him. In 'Judas', from Persephone in Winter, we see the relationship between the two men as Christ experienced it. Christ chides his friend for the thing that keeps Judas out of heaven, his own self-loathing:

Old Judas, with your head for petty cash,
Your trick of justifying each offence
Because I was a boy—and ah, how rash!—
Because you half believed it all pretence,
That guilelessness, that queer white innocence;
Won't you forgive yourself? Two thousand years
Seems a long time for eyes too strained for tears
And hunted ... hunted ... hunted ... why, you knew
Just in the white-lit second, all was true. (1-5, 13-16)

It is as if Christ has allowed Judas to act according to his own standards, but
now seeks to pull him back into the community, if not with love, then with
reason and compassionate understanding: 'Silver—you'd given yourself to
buy me back. / You were my soldier. Dying like that, you live. / And still you
won't forgive' (22-4).

Hyde's considerable achievement in 'Judas' is, once again, to write
with wit and insight against the grain of received understanding (by which
Judas either hangs himself or is disembowelled by falling over in a field
bought with dirty money7), in order to reveal, as she does throughout her
poetry, the possibility of a different kind of compassion, wisdom and
understanding, one that is great enough and radical enough to include even the
very worst of men and women, by both current and historical standards. In
this inclusive vision the rehabilitation of the sinner is not necessary, because
the wisdom inherent in the vision itself allows its bearer the insight to
understand why the sinner acted as they did.

Hyde writes from a position of remarkable spiritual maturity, in
which it is clear that she has brought to bear on her understanding her own
considerable suffering, and transformed it, on paper at least, into something
good. Thus, in 'Forgiveness', also from Persephone in Winter, Hyde refutes
the notion of 'the most / Uncalled-for sins against the Holy Ghost' (2-3)
which, 'say the grave words, nothing can forgive; / No soul can wander blinded thus, and live' (3-4) with the argument that

Yet, if Christ mentioned it,
Or if some fierce-eyed follower wrote that bit,
I think they knew not then the entangled heart
The desperate littleness of human wit; (6-9)

from which she goes on to remind the reader of how this 'littleness' meant 'Ages of bloody conflict [would] begin / Out of our simplest arguments on sin' (11-12). Hyde's rejection of the maxim, written in *Matthew* and later promulgated by the apostles, that 'All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men' (12.31), leads her to imagine the forgiveness of both the criminals with whom Christ was crucified, not only the one who accepted him, but the one who rejected him:

'This night, thou'lt sup with Me in Paradise.'
(Thus to the wincing mouth, the grateful eyes.)
Yet, if they told us true,
When sweat and shame of Calvary were o'erpast,
I think He leaned towards that other, too.
I think His blue lips whispered at the last
Imperiously, 'I wait ... I wait for you.' (17-23)

Hyde is the heretic who seeks to bring into the world of Christian forgiveness all those whom narrative, tradition and culture traditionally exclude. The poems in which she interrogates biblical narrative are manifestos in miniature of this wider philosophical attitude, which is predicated on the imaginative compassion which, as we shall see later in this thesis, became the touchstone of her later writing.
The imaginative understanding that enables Hyde to recondition the traditional stories of Ruth, Magdalen and Judas in order to provide a fuller context by which their actions may be interpreted extends, in what is perhaps the ultimate heresy, to encompass even the Enemy himself. In ‘Temptation’, from *Houses by the Sea*, Christ is met, during his solitary Lenten journey, by his Other, whom Hyde describes as ‘Lucifer, lovely and still lamented’ (12), and introduces as ‘The ruined Brightness’ (1). The battle here seems not to be fought between good and evil, but between beauty and reason, with Christ taking the part of Beauty, which cannot be possessed; neither can it drive out chaos or proffer intimacy, which is what Lucifer offers Christ:

> The ruined Brightness led Him up, and shewed Him  
> No cities of the earth, but one white rose:  
> Took gently away the bloodstained wine, bestowed Him  
> With water governed in that intimate close:  
> Saying, ‘All these, and more of mine, I give thee,  
> O buffeted Sandal!  
> So that Thine eyes, shining the unchanged candle,  
> Shall know and honour and forgive me.’ (1-8)

When Christ rejects the fallen one’s ‘reasoned citadel’ (11) for the chaos of nature and the hierarchy of heaven, then rationality and reason fall too. Thus, the second stanza of Hyde’s poem may be read as an allegory for the failure of reason to account for the Christian experience. The ‘darkness’ (16) that comes upon Lucifer following Christ’s rejection of him is the darkness of the rational man who finds himself outside the kingdom of heaven, the necessary atheist who still wants the things in which he can’t believe:

> But He, smiling home the look, nor sorrow nor mirth,  
> Turned back to the swelled plains battle-tented,
And said, 'Thou to thy reasoned citadel; I to My earth,
Lucifer, lovely and still lamented:
Or follow.' Young and alone, the Son of Man
Stepped down to the slayings, His red cloak drawn on the wind.
And a green stabbed sharper than green. And darkness began
To crevice the face of the watcher behind. (9-16)

We have seen, then, how, though Robin Hyde disavows in several stridently-expressed poems any allegiance to God on the part of his creation, she remains deeply engaged with the narratives of the Bible, which she rewrites, reconfigures and remakes, investing them with her own sense of moral justice and spiritual priorities. We will see in the subsequent chapters of this thesis the other ways in which Hyde speaks on behalf of those she believes are excluded from their communities, and the complex relationship that exists between her vision of these communities and her sense of her own conduct as a person in society. Hyde herself wrote 'I am not a Christian' (AHITW, 37), an assertion which she elaborated on thus:

It is the four seasons that wax and wane in me, it is autumn that hangs so heavily golden-ripe, spring that is pallid and fretful and full of a strangeness of cherry flowers. Nevertheless, now people trample over their heads, the saints would not mind, perhaps, that I should make use of their drinking cups. (37-8)

From this quotation and from the poems I have discussed in this chapter, we can see that the way Hyde is 'not a Christian' is special, complex and indeed unique. Rather than the uneasy dialectical attacks through which her poetical contemporaries engaged with the Christian tradition, Hyde interrogates the collective imagining of the Christian narratives through her own re-imagining of them. Thus, as we have seen, many of Hyde's poems concerned with
Christianity can be read as not only heretical but revolutionary, reminding the reader of the way in which, though religious narratives have boundaries of time and tradition, their figurative potential is limitless and subject to reworking in each age and culture.

Though Hyde is not a Christian, neither is she an atheist. As I have suggested throughout this chapter, it is most helpful in understanding Hyde's relationship to the Christian tradition to view her as a heretic: one who practises 'a belief or practice contrary to orthodox doctrine', or, more colloquially, 'the holder of an unorthodox opinion' (COED). Hyde's position is heretical in both senses of the word: her call to redefine the community of Christ so that present-day Magdalens and Judases are loved and welcomed as they ought to be is both contrary to the received Christian tradition by which one should 'hate the sin but love the sinner', and stands directly in opposition to the other deadly tradition of Hyde's times, which she called 'the tradition of respectability' (AHITW 28), noting that it 'was very strong in my household and had cut me off from all real family love the moment I infringed it' (28). Hyde's heretical relationship to Christianity, then, may be interpreted as more than an imaginative or intellectual exercise: there is a mission-like verve to her engagement with a tradition by which she has been so hurt, but which, the body of her Christian-centred poems suggests, has within the seeds of healing as well as destruction. Ultimately, this is what distinguishes Hyde's Christian poems from those of her contemporaries. Within the tradition, she refuses to adhere to the orthodoxy,
yet remains hopeful that the message within, beside and around the biblical narratives and the traditions of their telling, can be rehabilitated to heal those who, like herself, will not yet abandon it for the dialectics of the disaffected atheist.

If the above were the totality of Hyde’s spiritual position, then she would be a martyr indeed, courting the attention of her society’s moral and religious inquisition by parading her dissent. Hyde’s poems which are concerned with interrogating and elaborating received Christian narratives are, numerically, the greater part of that portion of her poetry concerned with ‘spirituality’, with world-view, with what Leggott has called ‘the business of community’ (1995, 276) and with the moral worth of the worldly subject, the ‘sinner’ of Christian vocabulary. However, though they are an important part of Hyde’s poetry to which little attention has been thus far paid, and which it has been the stated intention of this chapter to draw attention to, there is more to Hyde’s status as a heretic than her overtly dissenting position. Encoded within a group of poems on a more diverse range of topics is the distorted, polyglottal voice of another, historical heresy: Gnosticism. The voice of the Gnostic in Hyde’s poetry is ever subtextual: its occurrences are perpetually fragmented and unstable and are not, unlike her Christian narratives, a systematised challenge to orthodoxy. Rather, they reflect the permanently restless, revisionary nature of Hyde’s literary subjectivity and reveal to the reader the extent to which Hyde was prepared to work without the support of a critical community able to comprehend her poetics. Thus, the subtextual
images of the Gnostic’s quest which are woven throughout Hyde’s poetry function as metaphor, both for the late modern subject’s quest for gnosis and the high modern Artist’s quest for knowledge. Indeed, as we shall see, these two concepts Hyde often renders as one. In the last part of this chapter, then, I want to highlight the places where Hyde’s poetry bears the mark of Gnosticism, and explore the way in which we may understand the idea of secret, heretical knowledge, often withheld and often unuttered, as a gendered metaphor for the condition of the writer and her writing.

‘Oh, I am half afraid, eyes overbright, / Of what is at your Other End of sight’: Hyde and Gnosticism.

The heresy of Gnosticism centres around the idea of gnosis, a word from colloquial ancient Greek meaning knowledge through personal acquaintance (Layton, 9). Because of its historical association with heretical practitioners, the idea of gnosis suggests also a set of metaphorical attributes: knowledge gained covertly, held in secret and passed on under cover. These attributes are as important to the traces of Gnosticism in Hyde’s poetry as the actual theology of Gnosticism itself. Since the Gnostic heresy has no concise statement of faith, no closed canon and no identifiable point of origin, other than its arising in the Hellenized world around the time of early Christianity, it has been historically a set of beliefs detected by inference and thus policed with some paranoia by the Christian orthodoxy. In Hyde’s poetry, the Gnostic trace is always gendered, a pan-historical expression of the restraints imposed on the subject by the condition of femininity. Just as Gnosticism
itself intersects with Christianity, Judaism and Greek philosophy, so its trace in Hyde’s poetry occurs through a variety of mythological structures. One scholar of Gnosticism, Bentley Layton, explains how ‘Gnostic myth is the literary creation of theological poets—an elaborate theological symbolic poem, and not the spontaneous product of a tribe or culture’ (12); from this we can see how suited to Hyde’s literary and spiritual aims such an imaginative structure is, intersecting with her concerns about Christianity and notably parallel to the literary and political worlds’ constructions, over time, of the nature of the gendered subject. Also important to our understanding of the Gnostic traces in Hyde’s poetry is Layton’s identification of a ‘subplot’ which is ‘[r]unning throughout’ the Gnostic myths of origin and creation, and whose function seems to be to explain the nature of human subjectivity. This subplot, which, Layton notes, is ‘sometimes just below the surface’ of the principle Gnostic myths, is made from ‘theft, loss, and ultimate recovery of a part of the divine’ (13). Thus, the Gnostic subject, like the subject whose gender poses a social and cultural disadvantage, is seeking to restore to herself the section of the divine inheritance which was rightly hers at the origin of the world.

This again is congruent with Hyde’s poetical point of view, in which subterfuge and covert practices have become necessary parts of the gendered subject’s journey to personal and artistic understanding, gnosis. What knowledge the Gnostics have on Earth seems only ever to be partial, and the full gnosis that they seek is, like the Artist’s understanding, elusive and
beyond the bounds of consciousness and language. Thus, what protects those who are marginalised by society, by culture and by family, with whom Hyde identifies and on whose behalf she speaks so eloquently, is their citizenship in a community of silence, which constitutes the missing discourse of the oppressed, specifically, women. This community is also a place where gnosis outstrips language and thus becomes unavailable to the reader at the level of the text.

The eponymous poem of Hyde’s first collection, *The Desolate Star*, thus loses its innocent, fey quality when read as a Gnostic manifesto. The speaker tells how she is unlike ‘All the living stars, the other stars’ (2), since, though ‘Little winds of dawn come gently to them, / [...] / Dim rains passionate with scents bedew them’ (1, 3), she must ‘go lonely’ (5). The young speaker demonstrates a precocious sense of the gravity and loneliness of her journey down a road whose ‘descending’ (14) is entirely solitary. It is as if the speaker is entering a more ancient mythological and imaginative location than the Christian place of punishment, whose locus is the Artist’s disavowal of the conventional life:

[...] They know not,
They whose flowers quicken at their heart,
Of the darkness where the life-fires glow not,
Where, set apart,
I must follow, lost
On a blue road’s descending,
Which, for years that know not birth or ending,
No wayfarer has crossed. (9-16)

‘The Desolate Star’ thus announces explicitly its speaker’s farewell to the
world of respectable community, where 'Purple-plumed, the nesting twilight covers / All their golden windows' (17-18), in order to seek, alone, the artistic and spiritual gnosis of the questing imagination. Hyde's speaker looks forward with trepidation as she relinquishes the last comforts of bourgeois community, in order to strike out alone on her quest which is, as yet, barely defined: 'Is the cry of the wind's going through empty spaces, / For ever, mine only?' (23-4).

Other poems collected in *The Desolate Star* also explore the idea of the young subject's quest for gnosis, revealing for the reader the ambivalence which necessarily comes with such an undertaking and which can easily overshadow the hope of its attainment. Hyde's particular experience of the social difficulty inherent in the quest for gnosis is allegorised in 'Half Moon', a poem in which anarchy has been unleashed in a threatening scene from an imagined Arcadia, whose inhabitants are under the spell of satyriasis.10 'Go quietly', the speaker tells the virginial addressee,

i

least unaware
You find the leafless path that leads
To where an older god than God
Makes cruel music through the reeds.11

The lilies float like slender hands
Towards a satyr-trampled brink.
With crowns of oakleaves in their hair
The shouting fauns come down to drink.

Not Innocency's self shall walk
These breathless ways and shall not see
The wine-stained lips and dangerous eyes,
The swart-faced folk of Arcady (5-12)
The spectacle of this predatory communal rampage is ever threatening the subject on her quest for gnosis, says Hyde's speaker. This pageantry of anarchy is more than a disquieting distraction; its consequences are short, sharp and permanent. For the young man, it is a distortion of his erotic imagination at the expense of the quotidian women he no longer wants, while for the young woman it is physical and social ruin. Rescue, if it comes, is useless:

And never shall the watcher seek  
His tender human loves again;  
For marble-white, with singing lips,  
The woodmaids glimmer though his brain.

Go quietly. The tall gods here  
Would wear your beauty like a flower,  
To crush with jests and cast aside  
In one unpitying, splendid hour. (25-32)

Hyde captures here, through unforgiving allegory, the excruciating and bewildering loss of agency and a tradeable reputation that precocious, unauthorised sexual conduct, which so often accompanies the artist's rebellion and the subject's quest for gnosis, brings. Later, as we shall see, her speakers lay claim to this early knowledge as part of gnosis's feminine inheritance, but in 'Half Moon' this precocity is depicted as an obstacle, rather than a path, to gnosis.

Many of Hyde's poems concerned with gnosis were written between the period 1930 and 1935, a point to which I shall return later. What is immediately noticeable about the poems from this period which demonstrate some Gnostic affiliation is their concern with the gendered journey of the
female subject. The lone woman in search of gnosis, whether as a trophy to
be won or as a balm for a damaged psyche, recurs in a cluster of poems from
Hyde’s middle period. It is as if Hyde’s imagination itself passes through a
series of Gnostic emanations, her vision embodying figures and settings
extant, historical and imaginary. The unpublished ‘Dark Tower’ (AU 89.1),
which also exists in manuscript as ‘The Granted Prayer’ (AU 89.2) takes
place in one of Hyde’s imagined worlds. Here, the female subject has
acquired gnosis quite unlike that for which she set out. The speaker describes
the woman’s attainment of an understanding of self and world notable for its
difference and distance from ‘the clear-eyed visions that had been / The
promise and the glory of your quest’ (5-6). The success of her quest is cast
in explicitly Gnostic terms when we see how she has won her understanding
by thievery, just as humans first came into possession of spiritual knowledge
in the Gnostic creation myth: ‘[...] having known the granted prayer—having
seen / Your stolen jewel shine safe within your hand / And laughing, strung it
on a wanton breast.....’ (1-3). This, explains the speaker, is the knowledge
that is gained through facing up to the failure of one’s original vision and
embracing the fragments and remnants that together make a new synthesis, a
new point of imaginative departure:

Your comrades in some angel-guarded land
Were but the stained sword and the dark shield bright.....
Having left the springs of faith, and wandered past
Valleys blue-veiled by peace as by a mist,
And coming to the desert, faced at last
Your doom of blunted hopes and broken tryst [...] (7-12)
The Gnostic reward towards which ‘Dark Tower’ moves is the obliteration of memory. Memory itself, this poem suggests, is in its active state the seat of suffering; the speaker, we are told, has finally ‘lost her way of grieving in the night / For all the clear-eyed visions that had been’ (4-5). In the last six lines of the poem, the female subject is revealed to be beyond the material world where, she hopes, an emanation of her quest may yet remain, its false and discarded objects testament to her efforts for those women who may come later:

You shall have no remembrance of the stars,
But only some dim hope that they may shine
Clear on the desolate country of your youth,
To show some other heart, sharp-etched and fine,
The stately peaks of your abandoned truth,
The swords of Heaven that ring on earthly bars. (13-18)

The subject here has achieved a Gnostic union with the divine; those who follow remain behind in a world which, full of false hopes, and dreams guaranteed to fail, appears, if not evil, then worse than neutral. This too is a Gnostic position, recalling the myth of the world created by Satan, or Ialdabaoth, the imperfect son of Wisdom, or Sophia (Layton, 16).12

In Hyde’s Gnostic poems, the state of forgetfulness achieved by union with the divine is something on which she meditates extensively. This is an important point of departure from the way she re-imagines the narratives of Christianity, since, instead of investing their poetical energies in recasting an extant narrative, her speakers here look to an annihilation of thought and feeling, envisaging a sensory trajectory whose end is outside the bounds of the
Christian narrative world. In ‘The Writing on the Rock’, from *Persephone in Winter*, Hyde combines this concern with her interest in the single female subject, here historically emblematised. This poem, whose final four lines became Hyde’s own epitaph, inscribed on her London grave, emphasises the futility of accounting, by narrative or philosophical means, for the subject who has sought gnosis as an antidote to the pains of gendered life. It is a text at once about a dead young woman and about the many metaphoric resonances of this idea. Hyde’s ‘She’ (2) in this poem is thus both social sacrifice and self-sacrifice, a lost figure whose death has relieved the community of the difficulty of dealing with her.

The reader in ‘The Writing on the Rock’ stands outside the subject’s experience, while the poem’s speaker counsels with plain imperatives: ‘Let it be; say no more’ (1). The same abundance, and indeed excess, of emotion that is implied in the ended quest of ‘Dark Tower’ is again implied in this poem, in an image which also links the female subject with Hyde’s favoured figure, Magdalen: ‘She had desire to be loved / Too jealously, and pressed upon God her face / Wet, wet, importunate, through the long hair’ (2-4). The extremity of the gestures with which the woman conducts her search acts as a kind of sealing-off of ‘[w]hat she learned there’ (5), just as the woman herself is now sealed in her grave. It seems that the outcome of this ‘desire to be loved’ (2) has been fatal, with the woman ending her search prostrate, desperate, apparently assassinated by a cupidon before a pagan shrine:
What she learned there
Of blind gold images, with eyes unmoved,
Of the taste of dust upon the temple floor
And the tiny twang of the arrow ending the chase
Is not for us to care. (5-9)

Hyde writes after ‘The Writing on the Rock’ fewer poems concerned with the individual female subject’s quest for gnosis. Unlike Magdalen, the woman in ‘The Writing on the Rock’ has not been saved in any conventional terms; indeed, it seems that she has been punished for the fulsome, the desperate extremity, of her search. The Gnostic narrative in ‘The Writing on the Rock’ is an extreme which Hyde recapitulates only infrequently in her subsequent writing. The desperate remove of the subject in this poem seems to come from the idea that the condition of femininity, experienced outside conventional social containment, is itself extreme. Despite this, the conclusion of ‘The Writing on the Rock’ is tender rather than brutal, emphasising the futility of pity in the face of the silence of the ended quest:

These things are writ on the brow
Taken back from Time. But now,
However still God be,
As quiet is she. (10-13)

The imaginative strength and technical prowess of this poem come from the tension between the complexities of the ideas of its speaker and subject, and the brevity and tightness of its lines. We can see how a poem such as this is considerably more conceptually sophisticated than Hyde’s earlier work in The Desolate Star, in which she introduced her reader to the nature of the Gnostic
quest.

From her complex poetic meditations on the fallen female subject's quest for gnosis, Hyde is easily able to move into a consideration of the same subject in the time when humanity and mortality will be most closely pressed: the apocalypse. The nature of the final saviour or destroyer in Hyde's apocalyptic poems remains heretically unknown, but the community's experience of destruction is described for the reader through models of femininity and maternity. Even at the end of the world, Hyde suggests, the difficult dynamics of power remained gendered. In a poem published in *The Conquerors* as 'Woman', Hyde suggests that it is not passive withdrawal but rather an active seizing of the means of control that will give women the power to condition the present and determine the future. Once again, her mode of expression is heretical, as the female subject, speaking from the temple that Samson is destroying, prepares to take up her magisterial inheritance. Hyde's female avenger derives her authority from her suffering, both as oppressed subject and as child-bearing mother, which is here the gnosis necessary to 'come unto the desolate hall alone, / And mount the stair, and seize the empty throne' (13-14), while about her 'the blind giant in his agony / Wrenches the pillars, that before he die / All in this evil house may know his power' (3-5), and one may

Hear our brave leaders shriek to one another,
'Save me, my friend.' 'Save yourself, oh my brother.'
(And some flee burdened with their pilfered gold,
And some limp empty-handed, crazed and old) (6-9)
This poem is a sustained and indeed magnificent vision of the apocalyptic power of the gnosis of the oppressed. The understanding of the subject in society gained by those of lowest status is here divorced from its usual Marxist context and given a messianic sheen. Hyde’s speaker substitutes her own name for the name of God,¹⁴ and declares her authority:

I am The Silenced. From my ageless dumb
Affronted calm, the last commands shall come
[....]
Now I will stretch my hand, and save the maimed
Giant who comes against me to destroy;
And make her very woman again, that shamed
Delilah whom the nation took for toy. (15-16, 23-6)

Samson, blind and mad, is saved by the speaker; Delilah is rescued and restored to a gendered dignity, just as Hyde restores in her Christian narratives the reputation of Judas and Magdalen. The final power the speaker claims in ‘Woman’ is both practical and cosmic: without the sexual loyalty of their wives, the nation of warriors will be raising their mortal enemy. It is a bleakly humorous and structurally ironic end to a complex poem, whose internal comedy is almost buried by its speaker’s apparent high seriousness:

And man may choose the portent of his fate—
Whether he rule in honour, and be great,
Or if The Silenced laugh; and laughing, face
The ring of spears, the unnumbered alien race. (27-30)

‘[...] sapphire lettering, faded blot / Were fired in Alexandria’: Hyde’s Byzantine Gnostics.¹⁵

We will see in Chapters 3 and 4 the way in which Hyde takes from the natural
world more than one set of imaginative structures which exist in complex dialectic with other ideas dominant in her poetic sensibility. This is also true of the relationship in Hyde's poetry between nature and Gnosticism, and indeed nature and spirituality. Thus, just as in 'Temptation', Hyde's Christ embodies a 'green [...] sharper than green' (15), in contrast to the artificiality of Lucifer's 'reasoned citadel' (11), so the bearers of wisdom in Hyde's Gnostic poetry are inextricably linked with nature. In the poem 'Jacaranda', published in The Conquerors, the speaker finds in the natural world a site of redemption, as she anticipates how 'sloons now, with quiet feet, / Evening will walk, who carries in her breast / All birds uncomforted, all flowers unblest' (2-4). Redemptive Evening appears like Sophia, or one of the other feminine emanations from the Gnostic pantheon, while '[t]he jacaranda petals one by one / Fall from the dusk' (1-2). The role of Evening is like the role of Vespers in the Christian day, indicating the closure of one era-in-miniature and the beginning of another:

'See, now,' she says, 'the twilight tree aflower. All we have dreamed, all that we might have done, With this proud abdication of the sun Is lost. But yet my still blue ways are sweet.' (5-8)

The presence of Evening is an example of the way in which Hyde's Gnostic heresy is largely parallel, rather than antithetical, to her poetical summations of Christianity, unlike the historical relationship between Christians and Gnostics. Just as Hyde's Christ emerges from the natural world, emblematised in his arboreal status in 'The Tree', so the goddesses and
travellers whose utterances appear in Hyde’s Gnostic poems are emanations from the immanence of Nature, the near. In ‘Jacaranda’, as it was in Hyde’s disavowal of God the Father in ‘In Darkness’, the as-yet unapprehended space of the far is represented by the night sky, which is also the space where the subject in search of gnosis travels in ‘The Desolate Star’. What is different in, and important about, the cosmos of ‘Jacaranda’ is the way in which Hyde inscribes it with a set of attributes distinct from the benign nurture she locates in the natural world. The night sky in ‘Jacaranda’ is oriental, Babylonian and Byzantine, marked with the narratives of the part of the world which embodies for the west many centuries of hidden knowledge, or gnosis: the cradle of Greek Christianity, the location from which were written both the heresiological writings which defined Gnosticism for many generations, and the Gnostic gospels themselves. Just as Babylon was the home of knowledges and hegemonies which challenged and at one time enslaved the pre-Christian kingdoms of the Old Testament, so Byzantium’s wealth of art and learning was a challenge to the aspirations of the Roman west and, after the fifteenth-century fall of Constantinople, the site from which Turkish incursions threatened Christian Europe. This may seem a lot of cultural material for one writer to raise in an eighteen-line poem. Yet from the second stanza of ‘Jacaranda’ emanate these multiple narratives, condensed into the image of the star that shines alternative names, histories and subjectivities on the one who watches it:

Out of the tawny west a star has risen:
He does not fear the forest of the night,
Who with his tinsel bauble made of light,
Weaves fairytale again in ancient prison. (9-12)

The appearance of Evening is thus superseded by the arrival of this stellar messenger who, though small and ephemeral, presides in kindness over a kingdom of suffering. It is as if his presence symbolises the myriad, if not infinite, alternatives to the constrictions of cultural and spiritual orthodoxy that the gendered subject labours under. He stands for non-capitulation to the knowledges that Hyde exposes in her Christian revisions as constricting, and reminds the observer that the comprehension of this resistance is the thing that may liberate the subject herself sufficiently so that she too may ‘[w]eave[...] fairytale again in ancient prison’ (12). Here, diminutive status is no barrier to spiritual courage: ‘Why should he fear the thorn-groves, the bebrambled / Cliffs where so many greybeard fools have scrambled?’ (13-14). The fact, Hyde’s speaker suggests, that there is much more knowledge and experience in the collective memory than any one culture or individual may know, is liberation into the world of gnosis and Gnosticism, whose otherness is freedom and whose secrecy is wisdom:

For he is master over ancient lore,
What the Chaldean knew, this monarch knows,
And strange wands move beside him and before,
And light is round him, like a yellow rose. (15-18)

The light that the speaker of ‘Jacaranda’ calls ‘this monarch’ is like the star which the eastern astrologers of the gospel of Matthew followed in search of the infant king, astrologers who took their knowledge back to their unnamed
kingdom and out of the realm of the knowable text.

We have seen in Hyde’s poems concerned with gnosis how the role of the knowable text in the quest for spiritual understanding is as a gateway only; those things of value that can be apprehended are perpetually beyond containment by language. Thus, Hyde in her poetics relies on suggestion, symbol, allusion and allegory to draw her reader into her Gnostic world. ‘Spoil’, the last poem in the volume *The Conquerors*, is one of the most dense demonstrations of this technique in practice, in a poem in which Hyde’s speaker makes again the case of the gendered Gnostic: that masculine oppression, since it eventually becomes mortal peril, may (in contrast to the argument offered in ‘Woman’) best be met by no word or action at all, but by withdrawal into silence. The Byzantine woman who speaks in ‘Spoil’ dictates to an invading messenger a collection of gendered, Gnostic parables intended for a man whose identity may be lover or rapist. If there is a historical backdrop to this poem, then it is the wretched sacking of Constantinople by disaffected soldiers who had failed in their attempt to stage a fourth crusade. Just as the poem stages the meeting of Byzantium and Christendom, so it also has renegade Gnosticism speak to orthodox Christianity, vanquished to conqueror, woman to man. Without exception, the parables the compromised speaker dictates to the unnamed messenger deny the right of the absent soldier to any knowledge of his lover. They are a defiant retreat, the Gnostic’s defence of her gnosis from the invasive reach of the gendered gaze of the soldier and the critic:
Tell him you found me as a book
Some hasty few had stopped to read
In that red glare: then ventured on
For treasure nearer to their meed.

As ushu wood, thin chains of gold
Writhing like snakes, carnelian rings,
Such spoil as made the tomb-thief bold
In days of Egypt's kings.

Say that some tale of moon-blanchéd wands
(A lie, my lord) was cipheréd here—
Of white and necromantic hands
That drew down blossoms from the air;

And many a proud and vanquished town
Whose gates burnt once against the sky
Told its despair unto this brown
Scroll that your men cast idly by.

Say that some little you could trace
Of questings in a phoenix wood—
The legend of a lovely face,
Its sorrows never understood.

Say, I had whiled an idle hour
With ghosts of what has never been—
The silver hind, the sorcerer's flower,
The breasts of the immortal Queen. (1-24)

Each of these short stanzas is tightly-wrought and full of intriguing composites of images; the overall effect is of another world intimately known and confidently proffered, only to be withdrawn with contempt. On the speaker of 'Spoil' rests the complex relationship between subjective states which are contained within the figure of the Gnostic, or, in a less historically specific rendering, the self in search of gnosis: the maker of fictions, the feminised speaker, the victim of mental and physical violence, the silenced and
the one who chooses silence. In this poem are played out these states, which are discrete and true in themselves but also metaphors for each other. In the final two stanzas of the poem, the speaker reminds her addressee that the Gnostic's withdrawal into silence is ultimately only a prefiguring of the necessary forgetting that comes with death, both of the dead and by the dead. No-one earns gnosis; gnosis cannot be taught. The speaker, a 'brown / Scroll your men cast idly by' (15-16), will take her 'lovely face / [With] sorrows never understood' (19-20) back to the Gnostic's fictive world, content to live as one of the 'ghosts of what has never been':

But why should he whose soldier's hands
Weigh not a full world overmuch
Dream that the crystal tower yet stands?
Let beggared knights go seek for such.

And lest he doubt your wisdom, say
That sapphire lettering, faded blot
Were fired in Alexandria,
Their meaning soon must be forgot. (25-32)

There is an ironic tension between the intent of this thesis—the continued retrieval and return of the writings of Robin Hyde to the academic canon—and the fact that many of these writings follow the pattern of disavowal and denial epitomised by 'Spoil'; that is, that they deliberately anticipate and mock the politics that govern the critical community's debate over whose poems we ought to read and whose we ought not. The speaker of 'Spoil' who declares of her parables that '[t]heir meaning soon must be forgot' (32) reminds the reader not only of the failure of cultural and personal memory (the narratives of the Bible included), to contain the meaning of any
historical moment, but also that the function of memory is like the function of writing itself: to make fictions which stand in the place of forgotten histories.

The great majority of the poems in which Hyde interrogates Christian narrative or makes apparent the complexity of the gendered subject's quest for gnosis were written prior to 1936. The concerns of these poems are gradually superseded by the two poetical structures which I shall explore in the third and fourth chapters of this thesis: Malorian desire and Waleian contemplativeness. Hyde's poetical construction of an heretical spirituality, along with her many meditations on the journey of the Artist-subject towards understanding and gnosis, are eclipsed during her time at the Lodge of the Auckland Mental Hospital at Avondale by her extended contemplation of herself dependent on her psychiatrist and caregiver, Gilbert Tothill, a contemplation which, after Hyde's departure from The Lodge in 1937, gives way to the stylistic changes of her late poetics. I am reluctant to posit any specific biographical reason for this change except for the general reference I have already made to the shifts in Hyde's physical circumstances which brought her a new and pressing set of concerns, as I have already argued my reasons for privileging textuality over biography in this thesis. We may posit, however, that Hyde did not renounce her imaginative interest in the innovative and indeed political potential of the heretical narrative, since the speakers of 'Spoil' and 'Jacaranda', as well as Hyde's Judas, Magdalen and even Christ, have their complex position taken up again by the central figure of Hyde's 1937 prose poem, *The Book of Nadath*. This text has in Nadath an
embodiment of Hyde's Gnostic trinity of truth, lies and fiction:

The words of Nadath, the false prophet, written in the year 1937, in a house that stands on a bay of New Zealand: a house of wood, iron and glass, and with the sea outside.

When a sick man's reason leaves him, his dreams and visions go in and out, mingling with the people who enter his room: and who shall say which of them has substance?

So with a world that is sick: it cannot know the face of its truth. ('The Men in the Tower', 3)

In a time of political and personal confusion, Nadath asks for empathy for the false prophets, whose words, he contends, contribute to the context out of which the true prophet speaks. If Christ, for example, tells the truth, then it is only because of a context of much telling and many tellers that his words can be heard:

In the times before he lived, Christ of Nazareth, whose name also was Jesus: and before he dipped in the waters of Galilee his sandal, and brought up therefrom a shining stone: there was a day of darkness upon the land, and a day of many false prophets.

[....]

But of those false prophets who lived before Jesus of Nazareth's coming, Nadath says, They were the shadow of Christ.

Hold no anger against the shadow: for where the shadow falls, the presence is not far off. And the shadow is a part of him who follows. ('The Shadow of Christ', 5, 6)

There is more to The Book of Nadath than a return to the spiritual concerns of Hyde's earlier poetry. But its appearance after a period in which Hyde addresses in her poetry concerns removed (in terms of their image sources
and metaphoric structures if not their politics) from the preoccupations of her heretical narratives, stands as a reminder of how the imaginative reconstruction and narrative revisionism of Hyde’s Christian and Gnostic poems is the framework that underpins the approach she makes to all the writerly topics which concern her. The unstable and defiant-by-degrees position of the heretic is Robin Hyde’s poetical stance in its essential form. Like the narrative positions she adopts throughout her career as a writer, it is gendered, political, engaged with memory and with history, and, most of all, profoundly original.
1 Hyde, 'Jacaranda' (The Conquerors), line 16.

2 Hyde, ‘Truce on the Ark’ (Persephone in Winter), lines 43-4.

3 With the exception of the section ‘The Shadow of Christ’, from The Book of Nadath, where she uses both ‘Christ’ and ‘Jesus of Nazareth’, Hyde consistently refers to Jesus not by his Hellenized first name, but by the title ‘Christ’, which means ‘the anointed one’ and refers to the special status of Jesus in the Christian religion. We should not necessarily infer a belief on Hyde’s part in the divinity of Christ along the conventional lines of the Holy Trinity, as I argue in the main text of this chapter. Rather, Hyde’s usage serves to highlight both the recognition of Jesus as Messiah by his followers, and as a subtextual reminder of the historical church’s loading of that term with a specific set of values, orthodox and exclusive, which Hyde positions herself against. Thus, Hyde’s use of the name ‘Christ’ can be seen as revisionist and rehabilitative. As ‘Defence of Christ’ makes clear, she requires no less that a re-imagining of the way in which the figure of Jesus is defined by the name of ‘Christ’.

4 Hyde, A Home in this World, p.38.

5 Hyde, ‘Guarded Heart’ (Houses by the Sea), lines 27-8.

6 See Ruth 3.10-11, in which Boaz tells Ruth that

   thou has shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.

7 See Matthew 27.3-5:

   Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

   and Acts 1.18, in which Peter reminds the followers of Christ of how Judas ‘purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out’.

8 Hyde, ‘The Madman’ (AU 127.3), lines 16-17.

9 See Filoramo and Layton for their discussions of the nature of this ‘policing’.

10 Satyriasis is the masculine equivalent of the female sexual neurosis nymphomania, of which Hyde seems later to have suspected herself. In her 1935 ‘Journal’, she describes how she accuses herself before her psychiatrist of being a ‘sexual maniac’; his wise reply: ‘there aren’t any’. Hyde however shows in ‘Half Moon’ her awareness of the coercive and socially destructive power of unregulated male sexuality, from which one may ‘catch’ nymphomania as easily as one loses one’s reputation.

11 The ‘older god than God’ here is Pan, who once pursued with a rapist’s intent the nymph Syrinx; she was saved by being turned into reeds, from which Pan made his pipes; hence Hyde’s ‘cruel music through the reeds’ See Evans & Millard, p.60.
Ialdabaoth, in Gnostic myth, is also the father of Eve's sons Cain and Abel, the 'unjust' and 'just' respectively. Prior to the creation of humankind, Ialdabaoth commits incest with his mother Sophia (Wisdom), who gives birth to Destiny, or control by the stars, a bond by which Ialdabaoth and his offspring / fellow rulers, intend to enslave humanity (with the help of Ialdabaoth's other invention, sexual lust). Ialdabaoth’s first-born offspring, Sabaoth, was equated by the Gnostics with Yahweh, the god of Israel, unlike the Christians, for whom Yahweh was identified, in the Gospel of John, with the first principle, the 'omnipotent divine source' (14) the Word. See Layton, 14-25.

The original biblical passage, from Luke 7.37-38, accounts for the event thus:

And behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

See Exodus 3.14: 'And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you'.

Hyde, 'Spoil' (The Conquerors), lines 30-1.

Hyde in her 1935 'Journal' states that 'the jacarandas were a sea of blue blossoms' outside 'the hospital at Stanmore in Sydney' (2) where her first son, Robin, was born in 1926.

A case for the importance of Nadath in understanding Hyde's other major writings from 1937 and 1938 is made by Michele Leggott in her introduction to the volume.
'And the damosel would never go from him': Robin Hyde and *Le Morte Darthur*.¹

I wish I had my Malory here; he would make good reading in this wet, green and dripping place. *(A Home in this World, 14)*

And at the twelvemonth’s end he departed with his lady, Alice la Beale Pigrim. And the damosel would never go from him, and so they went into their country of Benoye, and lived there in great joy. *(Malory 1911, X.39, 72)*

In this third chapter of my thesis, I turn my attention from Hyde’s literary and cultural heresies to the role of Malory in Hyde’s poetics, particularly during Hyde’s residence at the Lodge of the Auckland Mental Hospital at Avondale. It is from Malory’s narratives of homosocial chivalry and heterosexual adultery that Hyde builds one of the most important facets of her literary poetics, which, in the intensity of its delivery, supersedes her Gnostic images: a structure of desire.

In her introduction to *Houses by the Sea*, Gloria Rawlinson cites Thomas Malory’s fifteenth-century prose narrative *Le Morte Darthur* as a major influence on Robin Hyde’s writing and thinking.² While many examples of the influence of Malory can be found in the subjects and images that Robin Hyde chose for her poetry and, to a lesser extent, her prose, the relationship between Malory’s late-medieval narrative and Hyde’s literary thinking is more complex than mere literary causality. As I have said above,
in the greater part of this chapter I shall focus on the way in which Malory’s
*Le Morte Darthur* provides Hyde with a structure of desire, a structure which
enables her first to make sense of and then to express her response to the
ideas and events which impinge on her living and her thinking and which
demand a specificity of response greater than that proffered by the allegory of
the Gnostic. My expanded picture of Hyde’s literary and personal poetics
will, I hope, enable the present-day reader of Hyde’s poetry to enter this part
of her textual world with greater insight and understanding, and may thus
provide the reader of Hyde’s life with a new ontological framework by which
to consider her ideas and actions.

Before I discuss the way in which Hyde’s poetics of desire is built
out of her reading of *Le Morte Darthur*, it is worthwhile considering the ways
in which Malorian allegory infuses Hyde’s poetry as a political as well as
imaginative force, providing the general frame of literary reference to which
Rawlinson draws the reader’s attention in her 1952 introduction. Hyde’s *Le
Morte Darthur* was a different text from that referred to by the title ‘Malory’
today. Malory died in 1471; his Arthurian tales were published in book form
by William Caxton in 1485, who provided an introduction as well as book
and chapter divisions for the work. Caxton’s edition, with subsequent minor
revisions, was the only known extant text of *Le Morte Darthur* until the
discovery at Winchester in 1935 of a manuscript free of Caxton’s
interpolations. This manuscript, which was prepared for publication by
Eugene Vinaver, appearing in 1947 as *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory,*
postdates Hyde’s engagement with Malory’s text. Although she describes in
*A Home in this World* ‘my Malory […] which] had illustrations by Arthur
Rackham’ (14), Hyde’s subsequent description of one of the illustrations
points to an earlier edition than the 1917 volume which Rackham illustrated.³
Hyde’s text of *Le Morte Darthur* was most probably a 1911 edition
published by Warner, with water-colour plates by Russell Flint. It is from
this two-volume, discretely paginated edition that all my direct textual citations
of Malory come in this thesis.

‘*My darling and my paladin!*’: Hyde and Malory.⁴

We may posit that Malory appealed to Hyde in cultural terms because his
narratives, like hers, both account for and derive from times of political change
and cultural confusion; thus, the collapse in *Le Morte Darthur* of the
mythological Arthurian kingdom is paralleled by the massive cultural shift
from medieval to early modern taking place while Malory, a soldier-criminal
in prison during a civil war, was writing his prose narratives. The context of
the production of *Le Morte Darthur* is similar to Hyde’s time in its political
instability and cultural confusion, both the consequences of a large scale war.⁵
Hyde’s view of herself as ‘Iris Wilkinson, knocking her head on the ground
and her bleeding knuckles on the door […]’ (*AHITW*, 28) while trying to
effect social change, is similar to the way in which Malory is, as one critic
suggests, ‘preparing the way for a new ideology which would make the
individual an end or value in and of himself' (Merrill, 8). Hyde in her writing exploits the Malorian inheritance that she has come into as a reader and a subject, as a person who is ‘different’ from the cultural mainstream.

Many of Hyde’s poems which make general use of Malorian themes and images take as their subject the carnage and social chaos of the Great War, which they consider both directly and allegorically. In ‘The Paladins’, from *Persephone in Winter*, whose title denotes knights errant, or knightly champions, Death gathers the young soldiers of the Great War to her with the same intimacy and devotion shown by the three queens who, together with the Lady of the Lake, take Arthur in their barge after he has received his mortal wound: ‘and so they set him down, and in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head’ (XXI.6, 492). In the first two stanzas of Hyde’s poem, Death is like a protecting guardian, shielding the senses of boys from the horror of the rape of their women, a homosocial perversion of chivalry:

Death gathered in the paladins
For very shame, lest they should see
What next chill phalanx of revenge
March in the plumes of chivalry;

Lest men who fought beleagueréd
Run mad and utter blasphemies
To hear rent womb and maidenhead
Answer, ‘Here lie thine enemies!’ (1-8)

This conceit, like the promised return of Arthur in Malory (‘Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross’ (XXI.7, 494)), is quasi-Christian: Death, like God,
protects and saves. But Hyde forestalls any accusation of cliché by making, in the last two stanzas, her allegory historically specific. What Death protects the paladins from is more than the rape of their girlfriends and sisters. Obliquely and aphoristically expressed in the third stanza, the idea seems to be that the death of the young men in war prevents a kind of international abandoning not only of conflict, but of any action or political commitment at all, a plague, like poisonous gas, of violence followed by apathy:

Lest Omdurman, Arabia,
Bewildered fling their weapons down
To aid the trapped and choking tide
Penned in the phosgene's taken town. (9-12)

Even this notion is Malorian in its origin, embodied in the figure of Tristram, who both reveres and hates the knightly code and not only adulterously loves Isolde, the wife of his uncle the Cornish king, but also refuses the comradeship of the Round Table's knights, fighting in disguise and adventuring alone, staying out of the way of society. Just as Tristram is eventually murdered by King Mark, in 'The Paladins' Death maintains, for the moment, the social order:

Death took a starveling peasant lad,
And hid blue eyes and beardless chin
Behind a gas-mask: 'Be thou glad,
My darling and my paladin!' (13-16)

Malory does no more with the conceit of the return of Arthur than describe it, in order to proceed to his account of the deaths of Guinevere and Lancelot; indeed, he seems anxious to distance himself from it ('I will not say
it shall be so, but rather I will say: here in this world he changed his life. But many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse: *Hic facet Arthurus, Rex quondam, Rexque futurus*’ (XXI.7, 494). Hyde, however, chooses to explore the possibility of the king’s rejuvenation, which enables her to make once more a searing social commentary on her times. In an unpublished 1937 poem ‘Arthur’ (AU 545), Hyde writes again from her enervated culture in which

Poorly enough fares Launcelot, Galahad  
Is a mincing priest, or a ghost in a wild beast’s lair:  
And the city lights, though they peck in her breast like crows,  
Have kept small mercy for Guenevere. (9-12)

The quality that fits Arthur to rescue this world is not anything he had in his previous incarnation, but what might be described as a kind of world-weariness gained from centuries in the grave, ever aware of the world above him. The same speaker who describes Guinevere’s living death under the ‘city lights’ that ‘peck in her breast like crows’ (11) asks:

Are you tired enough, Arthur, weary enough at last  
To deal with the burning darkness that flecks your brain?  
Rising at last calm-eyed to deal with the knave and trickster,  
To teach them that Arthur has come again? (1-4)

What the speaker wants Arthur to come back for is not the salvation of the world but as a bearer of moral honesty to a ‘world like a sore dog scraping the lice on its back’ (18). Hyde’s speaker angrily offers the alternative to Arthur of his judgement by ‘the wan eyes’ (21) of those oppressed people who, without any other recourse, must necessarily imagine the existence of ‘the Court where the eyes were just’ (24). In the speaker’s
opinion, Arthur must decide the affiliation he will make with 'the beard and the sceptre, the sword not given to rust' (22), since the current social need brooks no alternative. From a Malorian narrative Hyde has shaped an implicit call to political commitment, evoking for the reader the moral and humane requirement that the powerful ones act justly on behalf of the oppressed. In 'Arthur', Hyde thus moves from the pessimistic relativism that is such a component part of Malory's vision to her own push towards the utopian and the liberational, the art and work of the politically committed.

'I am a simpleton to love men so': Hyde and Malorian desire.

The poems I have discussed above are the public face of Hyde's use of Malory, and demonstrate her adoption of an imaginative structure with which she manipulates the key images of a narrative she knows well, to draw the reader's attention to the political agonies of her own time. Hyde's narrative strength in this regard is her ability to reveal both her affection for the Malorian narratives that she utilises as well as her awareness of their essentially tragic drive. But this is only one of the two ways in which Malory is useful to Hyde. I must now consider the way in which Malory provides Hyde in her writing with a structure of desire, whose provenance is far more personal that the poems discussed above and which appears to work as a powerful intellectual tool, sufficient to explain away many of the hurts and
difficulties that beset her in her life, while at the same time producing poetry that is dynamic and compelling. *Le Morte Darthur* gives Hyde an alternative to viewing the world from within the ‘tradition of respectability’ (*AHITW*, 28) which she so resisted; a way that means she can identify herself not with the redeemed prostitute Magdalen, as she does in her Christian narratives, but with Queen Guinevere or Alice la Beale Pigrim or any one of the Malorian women who achieve their desired mate by crafty means.

The fallen, unideal condition which is at the heart of the Malorian heroic narrative means that Hyde can find there the means to accept the difference between her ideals and conduct and what she took to be the contemporary prescriptions of family and society, without needing to evoke the spectre of moral condemnation that necessarily informs her consideration of the Christian tradition. When Hyde refers to her culture’s ‘tradition of respectability’ (28), she is referring to a way of life that impacted directly on her own. This tradition, she says, ‘was very strong in my household and had cut me off from all real family love the moment I infringed it’ (28). One narrative from her personal writings suggests something of the way this infringement happened. Unhappily, Hyde traces her departure from the tradition of respectability not to her late adolescence, nor even to the affair which resulted in her first pregnancy, but to an incident which seems to have occurred when she was about thirteen. In her 1934 ‘Autobiography’ written at Avondale and addressed to her doctor, Tothill, Hyde describes a journey home from town with her father, shortly after the Great War:
He and I returned in a Tramcar, with a soldier friend of his, from some show in town—The soldier friend was still in Khaki, and I'm afraid I was one of the many sloppy little idiots who gave to the grim uniform the unthinking hero-worship which may have helped all modern men to despise all modern women. (I mean, hero-worship without understanding or genuine sympathy.) I chattered, preened my features, left the poor hero laughing and cheered up. My father was very silent and morose as he climbed with me up the steep road to our house. Then, when the family were all gathered together in the name of supper,

'Iris,' said he solemnly 'I'm sorry to have to say it, but you looked at that man with the eyes of a harlot!' [....]

Still, no denying it, he did upholster me with the scarlet woman's trappings at a very early age. And right he may have been, but his way of making things conspicuous made them a little more real. (13-14)

It is impossible to conjecture accurately whether this narrative is a gathering of many memories, or merely one freakish event, but Hyde nonetheless goes to some lengths to make clear, elsewhere in her autobiographical writings, the way in which she came to feel conditioned to embody the role of the harlot that had so early been bestowed on her. Her father's fitting her with 'the scarlet woman's trappings' (14) is mirrored later in the 1934 'Autobiography' in Hyde's description of telling her mother, at the age of twenty, of her pregnancy: 'her [...] reaction [was] “You drunken harlot”' (cited in Boddy & Matthews, 21). In A Home in this World, written in 1937, Hyde adds to this narrative of her familial shaming by explaining that

Because one man had been somewhat unfair to me, almost in my childhood (and in order to be fair to his own physical demands of the moment), I had, in honour, to hang out a sort of notice: 'Not a Virgin. Unfairness Invited, Apply Within.' It tainted friendship and spoiled the possibilities of love, though physically and mentally I was well adapted for both (except that my mother had never taught me how to cook). (29)
It is as if Hyde has been taught her sexual nature by her family; from her late childhood she is an undefended harlot.

Hyde's point of exit from this miserable designation is appropriate to the high modern times in which she lived, and seems to take the form of a return to Art, to the power of the imagination to transform and make bearable the unbearable, when her narratives of identification with fallen figures such as Magdalen become unsustainable, as they inevitably must. We find in the imaginative currency of Hyde's poetry no reference to her father's inappropriate reading of her character, but instead a plethora of imagined worlds whose occupants validate her emotional and sexual choices. These imagined worlds fall into two broad categories: an allegorising of heterosexual desire in terms of knightly, homosocial companionship, and a series of workings-out of a transgressive relationship between a poetical narrator and a loved superior. Both of these visions are deeply located in the world imagined by Malory, whose ideal qualities support the first poetic category, and whose fatally unideal qualities uphold the second.

In the first of the ways in which Hyde's poetry engages with a Malorian model of desire, her poems show a deep engagement with the concept of companionship and obligation, something which exists in *Le Morte Darthur* between both men and men, and men and women. Hyde plays on the profound emotional ties at stake in such affiliative relationships to explore her own concerns, using the rich material inherent in the homosocial relationship between master and vassal, or senior and junior knight, to construct an
allegory of ideal romantic love between men and women. This is an interesting reversal of the marginalising of female experience which, as I have discussed in Chapter 1, Bunkle et al attribute to Hyde’s male contemporaries. It is also a very strongly restorative view, in which Hyde finds in Malory’s narrative an unspoilt version of the ideal love she hoped to find for herself, and which she believed she had experienced in her relationship with her friend Harry Sweetman, terminated by Sweetman’s departure for Europe without her, and his subsequent early death.

Hyde’s sense of frustration and depletion at the loss of Sweetman’s company is, as Leggott has noted, played out repeatedly in her poems. What is important here is the sense of loss his death embodies, and the way in which Hyde explores this loss in Malorian terms: the fleeing of the companion, the treachery of the vassal, the impotence of the lover. Oftentimes, Hyde takes advantage of the importance of homosocial bonds to western culture to elevate the status of her heterosexual love. In poems such as ‘The Wayfarer’ (AU 155), an unpublished sonnet written between 1930 and 1935, Hyde’s speaker addresses the departed companion in ways that evoke her memory of the loss of Sweetman, who was by now dead some six years or more. The companion’s road

[...] runs straight to distant hills, that glow
Against the sunrise, lustre-peaked with snow.
Mine in wood quietude goes wandering.
It leads to nowhere. [...] (2-5)

The consolation of the woods is the escape of madness: ‘Dreams are the
master here of wander-pain' (8). There is a clue in this line to the love relationship that this poem allegorises, since it is into the forest, wandering, that both Tristram and Lancelot go when they think they have been rejected by their loves. Tristram, when he thinks that Isolde has fallen in love with Kehydius, runs away from the damsel who is looking after him, 'and she wist not where he was become. And then was he naked and waxed lean and poor of flesh; and so he fell in the fellowship of herdmen and shepherds, and daily they would give him some of their meat and drink' (IX.18, 382).

Likewise, Lancelot when rebuked by Guinevere, 'swoon[ed] to the earth; and when he awoke he took his sword in his hand, naked save his shirt, and leapt out at a window with the grisliest groan that ever I heard man make' (XI.9, 191). Hyde's speaker, however, reserves the right, as a masculine figure, to upbraid his lord before disappearing into maddening solitude. Here, Hyde's technical control is evident, as the passion of the speaker's utterance remains regulated by the metre of each line, and thus retains a certain knightly composure:

You were a poor companion. Did you guess
How many burdens I had borne for you,
But that the fingers of your loneliness
Thrust us apart? Perhaps, you never knew....
And now my dark-tressed pines will shut away
Hills and hill-goers. I can only pray. (9-14)

The gender of the speaker is here destabilised by the way in which 'dark-tressed pines' evoke a woman's dark hair, drawn over her face, reminding the reader again of Hyde's remembered lost relationship, the 'poor companion'
who deserted her. Hyde’s familiarity with, and belief in, the Malorian model of loving, submissive companionship provides an ideal forum for her to transform the memory of her grief into poetry.

In ‘The Traitor’, from The Conquerors, Hyde similarly exploits the master-vassal relationship to explore another subject rankled by desertion. In this poem, a disappointed vassal has deserted his knight, claiming ‘It is you who were traitor, not I’ (1). The addressee has given up the speaker’s company for that of a woman, who, in the speaker’s opinion, is like one of Malory’s wandering damsels, a belle dame sans merci:

You who turned  
From the wet knife-edges of pain,  
From dull red hours, that burned  
To flickering dawn in the sky  
And a steady falling of rain  
To an infinite starlit meadow,  
To Her who stood in the shadow,  
Waters of comfort deep-cupped in her quiet hands;  
To the fragrance hid in her hair  
And her tender mouth bent near,  
And the gentle glimmering ways of her ghostly lands. (2-12)

The qualities the woman possesses here are ‘ghostly’ (12) and insubstantial. The addressee has given up the hard, sensual and masochistically erotic company of the ‘the wet knife-edges of pain’ (3) for the imaginative potential of the ‘infinite’ (7) and the ephemerality of ‘fragrance’ (10). But the speaker makes it clear in the second stanza that he objects to the loss on personal, not ideological grounds: ‘How shall I conquer’, he asks, ‘knowing not you at my side?’ (13). The weapons of knighthood are reduced to toys in the face of the absence of the loved superior:
Poor weapons you leave me now—
The tinsel armour of pride
And an old, unlucky sword,
And for grail, a broken shard
Carved in the youth of some dead tragic city. (16-20)

There is little hope left for the speaker, who imagines his loved master absent even from heaven; only at this last remove will he himself abandon his knightly quest to return to the lover:

If, when the rays of a naked sunrise shine
Kindling the purple boast in the victor’s wine
You are not there, to set your lips on the bowl—
I shall be done with seeking, even as you. (29-32)

At the last, the speaker imagines his gaze returning ‘to the west, where billows of sunset roll / Fierce on the stricken chariots of the soul’ (36), and finds the speaker located in the same hills that the knight-lover of ‘The Wayfarer’ set out for: ‘There will be peace, perchance, when the dusk burns blue.... / For the hills are friendly there ... for the stars are true’ (‘The Traitor’, 39-40). But the overall tone of this poem is as plaintive as its unpublished companion, ‘The Wayfarer’. The cry, ‘How shall I conquer, knowing not you at my side?’ (13), remains the dominant idea in the poem, despite the speaker’s ultimate hope of reunion. It is a vexed, painful working out of a paradox built on the fact that it is the speaker himself who has deserted his master. The coercive power of active agency has failed the speaker, and thus he adopts a passive position. In this manner, this poem seems something of a working-out of Hyde’s idea, expressed in her ‘Journal’, that ‘there is a great and not very well understood power attached to
obedience within freewill—one can be what one is not’ (59).

This tenet of the power of the passive, of erotic submission, is the idea behind much of Hyde’s relationship poetry; it is essential both to Malory’s world and to hers. The potential that Hyde sees in it is spelled out allegorically in the unpublished poem ‘The Captive’ (AU 99), also from 1930-35. Here, the speaker is a woman, whose submissiveness Hyde specifically locates in the context of knightly battle, focusing on the erotic charge that is created by the woman giving up her will:

If you had found me in a ransacked town
Its old grey church defiled, its stilly wood
Hacked for pure sport ... and, 'midst spoil't wine and food
A woman with wild eyes yet cowering down,
Dared you have understood? (1-5)

The speaker has put herself in a dangerous situation, attributing to the addressee the power to sexually coerce, or to rape her. She seems to trust in the addressee’s refusing to use this power, and goes on in turn to use the potential energy of her submission to cajole, and perhaps seduce, her addressee:

But you have found me otherwhere...... in Life,
Which is a goodly place of mirth and song,
Not soiled with wine, nor offering weakness wrong,
Nor undermined by secret tides of strife....
Here can be no abuse..... My lord, my lord!
That you were man enough to fit your sword! (6-11)

This is a complex conceit; the speaker has emphasised her own helplessness through an imaginative scenario with the potential for violence, but the truly passive figure in this poem is not after all the woman, but the male addressee.
The poem is a dense and authoritative working out of Hyde's rejection of her status as 'Not a Virgin' (AHITW, 30). The failure here is unequivocally on the part of the man, not the woman, who is able to reclaim her sexual autonomy in the assertion 'Here can be no abuse' (10).

We know from The Godwits Fly that Sweetman, was a 'poor companion' ('The Wayfarer', 9), not 'man enough' to 'fit' his Malorian, phallic 'sword'. In her novel, Hyde describes the chastity that Timothy forces on Eliza, refusing to match her passion because of a desire to think of her as a romantic ideal or idea rather than a lover. Timothy/Sweetman's leaving for Europe without Eliza/Hyde denotes him as ultimately unable to seize the erotic and romantic potential of the young woman's love for him. Hyde explores the emotional consequences of this failure of erotic nerve in such poems as 'Allegiance' (AU 153), written between 1930 and 1935, in which the speaker sounds much like the several damsels who are rejected by Lancelot, or like the frustrated sorceress Morgan le Fay, who fails to hold any of her lovers, even by magic. Hyde's speaker asks, 'Say, shall I turn and seek for the rusted keys, / Stranger cloaked in shadow of memories?' (9-10) and, in the last two stanzas, spells out explicitly her restrictive unhappiness:

These are your kingdom: wide-wayed seas, the bold
Triumph of circling mountains. I shall find
No path free of your footsteps, never a wind
Carrying not some scent or shadow of you,
Some quick bloom of your spirit. How shall I hold
Heart of mine in prison of white and gold,
When the nightbirds cry, over the clover-dew?

So shall you find me loyal while hills do stand,
For the hill-gorse knew your hand,
And the little mist, her ghost-face shadowed and wet,
Knows not the way to forget,
And the wind, that called you his brother, runs to the sea,
Laughing your laughter. How may I then be free? (19-31)

When the seductive manipulations of passive eroticism have failed, there is only the pain of emotional captivity, a fact which is well understood by Malory’s Elaine, mother of Galahad, who, despite telling Guinevere that ‘if ye were not [queen], I might have the love of my lord Sir Launcelot’, knows that there is no moral or emotional reparation to be had for such suffering: ‘Alas, said fair Elaine, and alas, said the Queen Guenever, for now I wot well we have lost him for ever’ (XI.9, 190). This sentiment is echoed by Hyde in ‘Companions’ (AU 142.2), an unpublished poem from the same period as ‘Allegiance’, in which the speaker remarks of her dead lover that ‘[i]t is well, perhaps, that he sleeps, and is free of the mortal load. / But my feet are lost......and I know not another road’ (23-4).

In Hyde’s Gnostic narratives we saw how her speakers were strongly gendered, embodying femininity and victimhood; indeed, these two states are constantly placed side by side in those poems of Hyde’s which bear the trace of the Gnostic. Gender in the world of Malory is, however, rather more flexible, and we have seen in the above discussion how Hyde finds in the world of homosocial chivalry ample images to express her ideal heterosexual relationship, as well as considerable material with which to illustrate her grief at the loss of a relationship she considered to be ideal. In ‘The Page-Boy’s Song’ from Persephone in Winter, Hyde returns to the masculine gender to
mock the conventions of femininity, and indeed of the poetics of romance itself; here the speaker is a young-old skeptic who suggests, straight-faced, that the *ars amatoria* are best avoided in favour of the safer world of homosocial competition:

Women are all the same,
Liege, and my lord—
Swift white falcons grown tame,
(Look to your sword!)
And the ware old fox Ulysses
Knew best what comes of their kisses,
Of the serpentine rill that hisses
Clean through their hearts, my lord.
[...]
Women are lotus lands,
My questing lord,
Delicate resting hands,
The first frail snowflake ignored.
There’s a dungeon behind their eyes,
And it’s oh, for the windswept skies!—
You were safer with enemies,
My trusting lord. (1-8, 17-24)

Hyde has shown in her other poems the way that male homosociality is itself easily changed to feminine allegory; thus the possibility ever remains that the male speaker and addressee are not men at all, but women pretending to be men. This speaker might be the lover-vassal of ‘The Traitor’, before he/she gives up hope of his/her lord and runs away, or it might be Hyde travelling as a boy companion with Sweetman, feigning a gender not her own to protect the secrecy of her ‘moonmist marriage ring’ (‘Companions’ 21), or it might be none of these at all, and simply an example of Hyde turning to another point of view, acknowledging the partiality of her own loves and losses. It is an important blurring of imaginative sources in a
body of writing whose subject matter is in some degree personal and painful, whose solutions are unconventional and often unliveable, and whose reach deliberately exceeds its writer's earthly grasp. It is this self-consciousness, combined with a virtuoso literary imagination, that gives Hyde's Malorian poetry its edgy pathos and its lasting complexity and appeal.

I have in the above discussion explored the first of the two ways in which Malory provides an important structure of desire for Hyde's poetry: the way that Hyde in her writing generates a schema of images and ideas based around the Malorian model of the knight-vassal relationship with its potential for gender and role swapping, and which Hyde allegorises on behalf of heterosexual romance. I have alluded to Hyde's belief that 'there is a great and not very well understood power attached to obedience within freewill—one can be what one is not' ('Journal', 59). This idea, which creates in the poems I have discussed a unique sexual dynamic, is one which Hyde seems to have worked out from the start in conjunction with Malory's narrative, and one which she explores in different ways in poems other than those I have cited above. Behind Hyde's adherence to this idea is always the notion, expressed in 'The Captive', that 'Here can be no abuse' (10). The imaginative worlds of Hyde's Malorian poetics are never inflected by the auto-ostracism that she adopted as a response to her difficult family life. Hyde's poetical favouring of 'obedience within freewill' is a daring way of conceptualising female sexual conduct, but its Malorian scheme guarantees its value as Art, if not morality. It is an important part of the way she sees not
only her terminated relationship with Harry Sweetman, but also her relationship with Gilbert Tothill, her psychiatrist at Avondale. What I am interested in concerning this latter relationship is, like the loss of Sweetman, not its factual details, but the poetics that exists in symbiosis with it. The poetry that proceeds from the later of these two relationships expresses the second means by which Malory provides for Hyde a structure of desire.

Hyde’s love for Tothill is a fulcrum on which rest both her thinking about Malory’s narrative and the shaping effect this narrative has on her poetry. Crucial to both these things is something absent from Hyde’s poeticising of her relationship with Sweetman, which she seems to have regarded as innocent and ideal. That thing is the idea of transgression, or forbidden love; in Malorian terms, of adultery. There is in Hyde’s thinking a conflation of the adulterous transgressions of Malory and the transgressive nature of her feelings for Tothill. Within this transgressiveness is also a feeling for Hyde of immense safety and fulfilment, an emotional space in which, perhaps because the relationship can never be consummated, there is safety and nurture and the return of the lost innocent self. This conceptual transgressiveness also acts redemptively on Hyde’s memory of her father’s construction of her, since the pleasures of the tensions inherent in her Malorian schema, as well as the sincerity and depth of her feelings for Tothill, belie the shame and negativity placed on her by her father’s attribution. These tensions and contradictions produce in Hyde’s writing poetry of imaginative prowess and erotic power.
‘Take me, hold me for ever. Tear off all other chains’: the dynamics of Malorian transgression.¹²

In accounting for adultery in Le Morte Darthur, Elizabeth Edwards argues that if, as Tony Tanner asserts in Adultery and the Novel, marriage in ‘the bourgeois novel [...] is the structure which maintains structure [...]’; adultery, then, is the paradigm of transgression itself’ (47). Edwards goes on to explain that

[while the medieval romance reveals a set of aristocratic values quite different from those found in the novel, social structures are nonetheless maintained by marriage there too; but the structure of literature, especially of plot, is that of adultery. I am suggesting that for the Arthurian cycle, adultery is the structure of structure. It is what sustains the court, and what drives the plot towards its ending on Salisbury Plain. (47)]

The homosocial affiliations of the Round Table, Edwards argues, are generated by the ‘socially beneficial effects of [...] adultery’ which themselves ‘are barely repressed, and sometimes openly acknowledged’, while ‘[t]he hidden conflicts of the Arthurian court are often produced overtly and even parodically in the court of Mark’ (47). Thus, transgression, embodied in the adulterous relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere, and, at Mark’s Cornish court, between Tristram and Isolde, is a fundament of the knightly life associated with the Round Table, universally accepted and tacitly acknowledged by all. Only Arthur the cuckold remains unaware, upheld by a
system based on his position as a knightly dupe. While the Arthurian court moves quickly to benefit from the affiliative tensions and opportunities for personal advancement created by Lancelot and Guinevere's adultery, the reality of the relationship between these two lovers is difficult to pin down; it belongs to the private realm of the erotic imagination, which Malory disregards as the province of the earlier French writers who are his sources. It is the inner world of the transgressive lover which Hyde's poems detail for us.

The nature of the love Hyde's speakers profess is a filling in of the relationship between Malory's Lancelot and Guinevere, of which Malory merely makes clear that the couple feel sufficiently compelled to be in each other's company that they are willing to risk the court and the kingdom for their love. Lancelot's adultery means that it is his son Galahad, and not he, who is permitted to find the Holy Grail, and even though he has been physically healed by it and experiences spiritual purification as the result of his association with the quest, on his return he quickly 'resort[ed] unto Queen Guenever again, and forgat the promise and the perfection that he made in the quest' (XVIII.1, 353). The relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere is private, but the context that sustains it is public: the court's awareness and acceptance of it. The adulterous couple are, together with Tristram and Isolde, considered ideal, or 'true' lovers throughout Arthur's kingdom, as characters frequently comment throughout the narrative. When Lancelot is relieved of his temporary insanity and returned to court by Percivale and Ector, 'Queen Guenever wept as she should have died. Then the queen made great cheer'
(XII.10, 215), while when Isolde sends Palomides away from her, she tells him to

[...] take thy way [...] unto the court of King Arthur, and there recommend me unto Queen Guenever, and tell her that I send her word that there be within this land but four lovers, that is, Sir Launcelot du Lake and Queen Guenever, and Sir Tristram de Liones and Queen Isoud. (VIII.31, 331)

Arthur, for much of Le Morte Darthur, is ignorant of his wife's adultery. Hyde, however, was, as we have seen, painfully aware of herself as a transgressive person who had transgressive relationships. Although she stages occasional textual resistance against such a designation, such as writing beneath her description of her father's humiliation of her, 'Bolingbroke, as low as to thy heart / Through the black passage of thy throat, thou liest', (1934, 14), Hyde also makes clear the way in which the relationship choices she made, specifically the choice to have sexual relationships, and children, outside marriage, meant that she was socially compelled to think of herself in the very terms she refutes through the quotation above. In A Home in this World, she writes:

I had a past moderately scarlet, but not cut-throat (by cut-throat I mean either mercenary or vindictive). It lacked, I am afraid, in any sense of humour, and I took my sins with diabolical seriousness [...]. Or much more often, I confessed nothing at all by words, but everything by action. (28)

Hyde attempts dissociation from her suffering in the playful tone she uses in this extracts, but they underline the way in which her status in reality was conditioned by the fact that her actions equalled transgression in
the times she lived in. Thus, for many of Hyde's poems, 'adultery is the structure of structure' (Edwards, 47). In thinking of herself and her relationships according to a Malorian model of transgression, Hyde distances herself from the societal pressures that meant that

after deciding in my young and foolish mind that I was Not a Virgin and must not let anybody likely to suffer be under the slightest misapprehension about the subject, I took the happier road. I became less than a woman again, a figure attached to white trees and crackling brown leaves [...] (30)

In the imaginative realms in which she is safely 'less than a woman' and only 'a figure', Hyde adopts the point of view of the transgressive females on the fringe of Arthurian society, the damsels whose doomed relationships mean their erotic life exists only in memory and in waiting. The most important of these figures to Hyde is Elaine, the maid of Astolat, whose love for Lancelot is never reciprocated and who dies of rejection. Hyde engages with Elaine in the space of contemplation between rejection and action, so that the several Elaine-narrators in Hyde's poetry perpetually explore the nature of futility, of love permanently unrequited.

It is in these terms that Hyde thought of her feelings for Tothill. Without specifically referring to Elaine of Astolat, Hyde's literary meditations on her feelings for Tothill exist in symbiosis with her poetry about transgressive love, and, as her reference to Guinevere shows, with Malory's narrative. The love she feels is fuelled by its existence, not by its mirroring in the other, and in this there is the same tragic frustration as Malory's Elaine feels when she says, 'Alas [...] then must I die for your love' (XVIII.19, 390),
yet there is also a dynamic of sustenance and care which Hyde derives not only from Tothill’s company, but from her awareness of the fact that she loves him and he will never hurt her; ‘Here can be no abuse’ (‘The Captive’, 10). Once again, we see Hyde’s ideal of ‘obedience within freewill’ (‘Journal’, 59) at play in these extracts:

I think the only happiness I have ever really had and trusted has been in knowing you—I don’t mind so much that it’s a phantasmal happiness, and one-sided—‘For so was it not with the old love …’ Read Malory’s Chapter about Queen Guenievere’s May morning, and you will understand [...] (‘Journal’, 46)

I love you, with all the stupid useless love of which I am capable. [...] If I could only be a man, and your servant. You’re my captain, which is more than any other man has ever been—it’s not only that I will do what you tell me, but that I can do what you tell me. (59)

In ‘Astolat’, published in Persephone in Winter, Hyde rehearses once more the suffering that the transgressive female subject endures. The poem takes place as I have described above, in the space between unrequital and death. The speaker depicts herself both literally and symbolically, so that she is both a woman and a won pennant, perpetually and tragically in thrall to the absent man. The line-length is long and reflects the woman’s dispirited state; the heaviness of her emotional exhaustion is like the weight of her head on the pillows:

I am weary of listening for a sound on the stair, For a step without, and a man’s voice, steadfast and low; No man does well to conquer a woman so That blind and still she waits for him, russet hair Spread in defeated glory over the white Pillows from which she dare not lift her head; Stilled is the room; for the tide of her being is fled
To ebb unseen round his going, come day, come night. (1-8)

The image of conquest is knightly as well as emotional and sexual. The second stanza makes explicit the link with Elaine of Astolat, whose ornamental sleeve Lancelot wore in a joust as a favour to her, before he refused her love. In the speaker's dream, she can only cling to the chance, the hap, that preserved the story of Elaine as part of the larger story of Lancelot and Guinevere. Not only is the speaker emotionally subject to the man she loves, she depends on the greater narrative of his life for her historical continuance. It is an invidious position, a marginalisation of a marginalised subject. Yet still there is the echo, in the speaker's assertion that 'I am rich' (9), of the satisfaction that comes from imagining 'obedience within freewill' ('Journal', 59), so that the speaker's vision still has some grain of selfhood in it as she enters the third person:

Sometimes she dreams, 'I am rich. I shall see him great....
Mine are the slender hands shall fasten well
His golden armour, what time he strives with Fate,
And a sleeve of pearls for the tourney at Tintagel.
Maid Elaine for the knight Sir Launcelot
In her ancient Astolat towers, made offerings such....
She died at the last, for he loved a Queen o'ermuch....
Yet haply her childish fingers were unforgot.' (9-16)

The insufficiency of the speaker's clinging to the notion of Elaine's 'childish fingers [...] unforgot' (16) is bolstered in the next two stanzas, where the speaker imagines herself in the time of the historical crusades. Here, she is 'a little like the Saracen maid / Who learned two names, the name of her Christian love / and his homeland's name' (17-19).
Here, the transgressive nature of her feelings are made explicit, indeed expanded, to cross-continental, cross-cultural love. The Saracen maid is unlike Elaine, for her dream is not of love but of violence. Her vision circles round an unabashed fantasy of murder, in which the speaker's linking of the colour of blood with the colour of the maid's lips is the same kind of eroticism as the vassal in 'The Traitor' imagining 'the wet knife-edges of pain' (3):

["... I would stand up, veiled and proud, Whispering over and over the name of my lord." 
[...]
Sometimes, in dream, the blood of his enemy drips 
From her dagger, in drops more bright than her pallid lips. 
And the world lies tranced in a moonglade's ivory spell. (23-4, 30-2)

There is, of course, no moral or physical reward, either in Hyde's or Malory's world, for a speaker who quantifies her love in terms of murder, and the final stanza thus returns to the woman in her state of exhaustion which is a parody of sexual exhaustion. The images point to her utter rejection by her lover, to the extent that even the '[p]ebbles [that] crunch on the roadway, rounded and white' are rejected, '[s]purned by the feet of one who passes by' (33-4). All the speaker can do is reiterate her claim that

No man does well to conquer a woman so 
That half she hears his step, on the dewy grass, 
And the moonlit sea sweeps back to let him pass, 
And her head sinks down, like a russet flag brought low. (39-42)

So elevated is this man in relation to her that though 'the tide of her being is fled / To ebb unseen round his going' (7-8), 'the moonlit sea' itself 'sweeps
back', as if commanded by God, 'to let him pass' (41). We know that Malory's story of Elaine of Astolat ends tragically, with Elaine's letter in her dead hand, 'Most noble knight, Sir Launcelot, now hath death made us two at debate for your love. I was your lover, that men called the Fair Maiden of Astolat [...]’ (XVIII.20, 393-4). Though Elaine is able to make the standard claim that 'a clean maiden I died, I take God to witness' (XVIII.20, 394), the poem 'Astolat' reveals the emotional corruption and personal subjugation that ruins the speaker's autonomy beyond any issue of whether she is 'a clean maiden' or not. It is a densely-wrought poem with considerable erotic charge, an insightful updating of the legend of Elaine.

Of Hyde's poems of transgression, 'Astolat' is the one most explicitly structured around the emotions of the speaker. In others, the narrative focus is on the speaker's surroundings, the haven, both physical and emotional, that she is building for herself and her lover. Through her speakers' increasing attention to the symbolic potential of their surroundings, rather than the wretched figurations of their inner longing, Hyde's trangressive narratives are gradually relieved of their dialectical pressure while at the same time their subjects become less isolated, less guilty and, ultimately, more fully in possession of their own agency within Hyde's model of 'obedience within freewill' ('Journal, 59). In 'The Dwelling', from *Persephone in Winter*, the focus of the language is directed outwards towards the speaker's surroundings which become an embodiment both of her feelings for the beloved, and of the beloved himself. The speaker describes with care and
devotion the bush home she lives in, having lovingly prepared it to please the absent lover:

There stands the dwelling. Though you never come,
See how I set the doorway just so wide
That it may frame the changeling trees outside
You would love best, slim truants from the green
Strong-kelp of bush, half frightened to be seen
So near lit windows, blur of cobalt smoke. (1-6)

It is not the trees, but the lover who 'never come[s]' who is more than 'half-frightened to be seen / So near lit windows' with the speaker in her bush retreat. There are echoes here of 'one of the small bush baches attached to the old Waiatarua Boarding House' (AHITW, xviii) where Hyde wrote A Home in this World after leaving Avondale, from which Tothill had also departed the previous year. Hyde writes in A Home in this World of 'this self, this runagate, half-frozen, half-dazed and almost completely incoherent, sitting on a bed in a bach room' (10), but in 'The Dwelling' the self has achieved tranquillity and the bach's status is elevated by its humble simplicity:

And all you would have loved, but may not own,
Crude earthen vessels, weaving stealing soul
From hands that made them, ancient blue of delft,
Copper's flushed flags—I set them on the shelf
Ordered for you. (15-19)

The dwelling of the poem seems like the habitations of damsels and ladies which knights happen upon on their journeys and where they are given rest and refreshment. In such a situation, Elaine of Astolat meets Lancelot for the first time, when 'there it happed him in the eventide he came to an old Baron's place that hight Sir Bernard of Astolat [...]. This old baron had a daughter
that was called that time the Fair Maiden of Astolat’ (XVIII.9, 369, 370). The speaker of this poem, however, has passed beyond the realm of the real into the purely imagined; having prepared with such care her dwelling for her lover, she can claim that

One dusk shall I lie tranquil on this bed,
And though no footfall crisps beneath the trees
Yet in the mirror I shall watch your head
Turn, half asleep; the candle’s stalk unfold
Its tall ellipse, the bud of blue and gold,
And you stretch out your arms—at ease, at ease.
Then let the darkness wind me how it please. (27-33)

Thus, Hyde’s consideration of the inner world of the transgressive erotic relationships which Malory passes over lightly in Le Morte Darthur extends to a peopling of the woodlands where Malory’s heroes face the martial and sexual unknown. Outside in the natural world, Hyde’s Malorian speakers find their transgressive natures easily accommodated within feminine Nature itself, away from the menaces of regulated society. Thus, in those of Hyde’s Malorian allegories which take place outside the castle or the asylum, the speaker’s gaze becomes more and more directed towards the metaphorical potential of the lovers released into the natural world, where the constrictive rules that govern transgressive relationships are relaxed and the speaker’s imaginative vision can easily expand to fill the forest and the world. Thus, the speaker in the unpublished poem ‘Tuberose’ (AU 81), written between 1930 and 1935, begins by telling how ‘Often I dream it thus […]’ (1). The vision in ‘Tuberose’ is both more fantastical and more eroticised than ‘The Dwelling’, but stems from the same impulse towards imaginative freedom
within the trangressive. The variable line length and fanciful imagery—‘fairy flowers’ (8), ‘swooning scent’ (9)—of ‘Tuberose’ are like embroidery on the surface of the poem, whose trajectory is once again towards the speaker’s ‘obedience’ borne of her own ‘freewill’, and, it seems, consummation:

Often I dream it thus: that I should veil
White body in darkness blue as the moving waters,
Blue as the hyaline locks of the river daughters...
Under each pointed breast would lie the frail
Tuberose petals.... but this you would not know
Till lips met lips in the darkness, and so the glow
Should take us both, of a young love strangely woken,
And the fairy flowers be broken,
And a swooning scent should arise from each crushed pale petal,
From the silvery molten metal.
I would give you perfume, and darkness, and quiet. These,
And love that dreamed or awoke, as your will should please.
(1-12, complete)

There are more than enough images here to satisfy Leggott’s assertion that Hyde conceals images of female sexuality in her poem; indeed, ‘conceal’ seems the wrong word here, as ‘pointed breast[s]’, ‘flowers’, ‘scent’ and ‘crushed pale petal[s]’ condense to ‘silvery molten metal’ as ‘lips [meet] lips in the darkness’. The same imaginative energy that produced the wretched speaker of ‘Astolat’ here uses what Leggott calls ‘the condition of poetry’ (1995, 269), its fictionality (or ‘partiality’, as Leggott calls it), to produce an optimistic synthesis of the same set of desires. We can see this more positive trajectory in other poems of Hyde’s which are predicated on transgression, in which she utilises her linguistic high competence to produce a vision of her fallen state of being that makes it a triumph not of transgression, but of naturalness. In these poems, Hyde’s speakers’ fallen
natures are indicative of their natural development as female selves, participating in the human world as an extension of the behaviour of Malory's knights and damsels and the woodlands they traverse.

As Leggott has shown in her analysis of yellow lupins in the introduction to *The Book of Nadath*, Hyde embeds her poetical sexuality in the world of flowers. This naturely exuberance occurs again and again in Hyde's poetry, often in the guise of the speaker committing symbolic adultery with the natural world. The long poem 'Husband and Wife' from *Houses by the Sea* is a frequently-discussed example of this, but others are important too. In the unpublished poem 'Amor' (AU 82.1), from between 1930 and 1935, the speaker declares that "I love you" (1) is 'what the tawny sunflowers said too / In their brown and gold voices. I never guessed' (1-2). Love is also a mutual possession between the speaker, nature and the addressee, but such is the blurring of the boundary between the speaker's identity and the natural world, that the identity of the addressee drops away, liberated from the painful weight of emotions it must bear in the poems discussed above: 'I fingered its coraline velvet, and couldn't guess / All this might be true— / Love from the unafraid wings, sunburnt grasses, and you' (9-11). In a similar manner, the speaker of 'Consent' (AU 159.1), also an unpublished poem from the same period as 'Amor', receives liberation from the need to address any human, and instead directs the attention of her passion to the flora and fauna around her. The effect is liberation; the transgressive self is invisible in nature, whose nature is itself passion, and the speaker's autonomy is restored by the
inevitable requital of her new 'lover':

Bellbirds and buttercups being in season
Seems to me insurmountable reason,
(Earth mad drunken on honey-mead clover,)
Why I should take to myself a lover;
And the deep, proud blues shall triumph above
When the grasses and I lie stilled in love. (1-6, complete)

In another poem from the same period, 'Day in a Garden' (AU 172), the speaker aligns herself with Malory’s sweet-natured adulteress, Isolde, who, with Tristram, accidentally drank a love potion that bonded the two of them together forever. Hyde's speaker is unabashed about this, and speaks with the confidence gained from consorting with 'the grasses' in 'Consent'. Declaring, 'Since you well know how much I'm yours / I know you wish my floral clock, this day, / Should tell what daring fragrances make wars / In my small garden' (1-4), the speaker describes this 'small garden' and pledges it to her lover:

All these are yours, colour and scent and touch,
The hint of mockery in a far bird’s calling,
Bright fragile fountain-drops of silence falling
In to my heart. I gift you not too much
When I but tell you how my days shine up
Naked and proud, having tasted Iseult's cup. (11-16)

We are reminded here of the 'small garden' Hyde herself tended at Avondale, whose flowerbeds she described, to Tothill and in writing, with loving care. In gifting the garden to her lover, it seems the speaker is once again exploring 'obedience within freewill', but there is more than this in this poem. There seems evident a more essential kind of exuberance that comes from
engagement not just with the tragedy of one’s own love, but with the spur this is to creative endeavour. The speaker has built the garden for her lover, and is happy with its building.

In ‘Consent’, the speaker was the lover of the grasses; in ‘Day in a Garden’, she builds a garden for her lover. In ‘Fragment’ (AU 476.2), an unpublished poem from 1936, the garden is explicitly configured as a female body itself. Here, merely by coming into the garden, the lover consummates his relationship with the speaker, responding to her commands whose striking metaphoricity reveals not only a joyful sexual confidence, but an imagistic eroticism sourced in the naturalness of the everyday garden:

Bruise my mouth with love-wounds, the time has come,
Bruise my heart with the long dark glances of dream.
Open the womb of the clover, start the delicate drum,
Leash the glitter of mayflies over the stream.
Laugh and stripe with silver the blackbird’s gloss.
Shake the hair of the kowhai, shake the glittering tree,
Strive in the dusk at the battle that covets loss. (1-7)

The speaker’s liberation here comes in the abandoning of the ‘battle that covets loss’, which we know from ‘Astolat’ and from the tale of Maid Elaine in Malory, is a self-created battle. Yet this battle may not need to be abandoned completely, and can be reconfigured in terms more egalitarian, and a lot more fun, than those of futile struggle of the speaker of ‘Astolat’, as the unpublished poem ‘The Duellists’ (AU 148.2), written between 1930 and 1935, shows. In this poem, Hyde returns to an explicitly Malorian schema, in which the speaker’s ‘[h]unger for woodland silences’ (6) reminds the reader that the battlefield is not literal but erotic, the passive and active agencies of the
lovers vying for the larger share of submission:

You are too wise for me. Yet I could wear
Such crystal armour, the light mocking air
Of the strange hearts that make believe to feel....
I think, sir, I'd outmatch your flickering steel,
Outpoint you at the game ... And all the while
Hunger for woodland silences, your smile
That brings me peace, as lotus moonlight stills
The turbulence of flame-gold gorse on hills.
Since you rate trickeries high, I can be wise.....
Yet ever watch for friendship in your eyes. (1-10, complete)

Through the accretion of flora, fauna and her poet's wit, Hyde's transgressive speakers collectively overcome the moral defeat of the speaker of 'Astolat'. Though Hyde in her private writings acknowledged the frustration and futility inherent in her love for Tothill, its expression in her poetry is regularly transformed from autobiography into writing, the poem a space in which Hyde can bring to bear all her best Malorian conceits, combined with her exuberant passion for the natural world. The transgressive model by which Hyde viewed herself, as one who had 'tasted Iseult's cup' ('Day in a Garden', 16) becomes in her poetry not the site of self-defeat or self-directed irony that it does in A Home in this World, but is instead changed into the energy by which the brightest and most sensual flowers grow. The speaker of 'Chrysanthemum', from Persephone in Winter, is thus a fallen damsel exuberant in her state. Whereas Hyde in her 'Journal' writes that she has accused herself to Tothill of being 'a sexual maniac' (to which he replies, 'there aren't any' [48]), the speaker of 'Chrysanthemum' uses that hint of excess to beguile the reader by comic overstatement:
See that dishevelled head,
Its bronze curls all undone?
I am that one,
The stubborn slattern of your garden bed (1-4)

It is as if the woman of 'Astolat', whose 'head sinks down, like a russet flag brought low' (42), has got out of bed and started laughing with her lover. The speaker of 'Chrysanthemum' uses the smells and sounds of an autumn flowerbed to echo the sensations of a sexual encounter, thus presenting a femininity that is the arbiter of its existence:

No sweetness for you here, but bittersweet
Admission that my hour must needs be fleet;
A frosty tang of wit, an autumn face,
Perchance the memory of some sharper grace,
That shone beneath the imperial yellow tiles
Nor needed stoop for princely sulks or smiles (5-10)

Hyde in her 'Journal' called Tothill her 'captain' (59). In this poem, the speaker seems to acknowledge that such a notion has been defeated by the chaotic pleasures of the imagination and of linguistic play: 'Tatterdemalion courage here, a ghost / To captain some obscure defeated host....' (11-12). Even Malory's wealth of images is relegated to the back of the garden, as the 'obscure defeated host'. Though the speaker remains aware of her status outside the mainstream, personified here in the 'springtime maidens, crisp as snow....' (13), the struggle to make a simulacrum of her lost honour is unnecessary for the speaker of 'Chrysanthemum' who, in a new confidence, claims, 'Yet, hapless sir, we know / Your fate ... to love me most' (14-15).
The structures of desire that shape Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* are vital to Robin Hyde's sense of herself and her status in society, damaged as it was by her family's configuration of her as in possession of what Edwards calls a 'lethal femininity' (40). The Malorian literary structures I have discussed in this chapter also provide a model which expresses the way Hyde would like men and women to relate to each other, in a space of free expression where the struggle is not for one individual's power to control or abuse another, but for the creation of a dialectical space between the active and passive poles of sexual expression. Within a similar space is the figure of the transgressive woman, whom Hyde gives many voicings in her poetry, from broken to exuberant. While Hyde's private autobiographical writings show the intensity of her feelings for her lost love Sweetman as well as her caregiver Tothill, the details of these relationships are much less important than the way Hyde transforms them into concepts and image frameworks for her poetry.

After her separation from Tothill and her own subsequent departure from New Zealand, Malory's writing becomes less important to Hyde, and her hope of a relationship in the style of Alice and Alisander, whose departure 'into their country of Benoye', to 'live[...] there with great joy' (X.39, 73) was one of Hyde's favourite passages from Malory, was put aside in favour of other aims. It is as if, through poems such as 'Chrysanthemum', where the speaker starts the process of moving beyond a Malorian model of desire, Hyde is acknowledging the existence of other voices and other narratives. In the next chapter I will explore the poetical
places to which Hyde's imaginative expansion into the natural world takes her, and the way in which this new configuration gives us a model for understanding Hyde's late poetics free from the major epistemological shift early critics have attributed to her.

2 See Rawlinson 1952, p.16: ‘[...] in Le Mort d’Arthur [sic] especially she found symbols of that visionary country she had long sought under so many names [...]’.

3 This volume was abridged by A.W. Pollard, as The Romance of King Arthur. Pollard explains in his introduction how he has attempted to pare Malory’s tales of their repetitive narrative excesses, as well as some of their moral dubiousness: ‘I have tried to clear away some of the underwoods that the great trees may be better seen, and though I know that I have cleared away some small timber that is fine stuff in itself, if the great trees stand out the better, the experiment may be forgiven’ (xi). Although Hyde claims on p.14 of A Home in this World that her copy of Malory was illustrated by Arthur Rackham, the Pollard/Rackham volume does not contain the textual passage that Hyde notes is her favourite, nor does any illustration of this passage appear.

4 Hyde, ‘The Paladins’ (Persephone in Winter), line 16.

5 Hyde’s 1938 novel Nor the Years Condemn is specifically concerned with the material and emotional consequences of the post-war years and the depression for New Zealand. A concise and helpful summary of the political and economic context of the Wars of the Roses can be found in Bruce Webster’s The War of the Roses.

6 My reading of Tristram here is taken from Merrill’s more general discussion of the function of the ‘Tristram’ narrative in Malory. See Merrill, ch.1.2, ‘Art, Culture and Order’, 21-51.

7 Hyde, ‘The Simpleton’ (AU 162), line 19.

8 From The Godwits Fly and her 1934 ‘Autobiography’, we can deduce that Hyde’s relationship with Sweetman, a young man at least five years her senior, began when she was fifteen and ended with his leaving New Zealand when she was eighteen. It was not until over two years later that she heard news of his death shortly after his arrival in England.

9 See also ‘Wayfarers’ (AU 3), an earlier version of this poem. A different poem by Hyde, also called ‘The Wayfarer’, was published in The Conquerors.

10 See chapters thirteen and fourteen of The Godwits Fly (143-52, 153-67). Ash gives in her thesis, pp. 42-4, a useful analysis of the way in which ‘networks of images [...] act as a structuring device’ (42) in The Godwits Fly, including how Hyde’s image frameworks reveal the way in which, during Eliza and Timothy’s second romantic encounter ‘within this place teeming with natural animal life, Timothy somehow fails to measure up’ (43).

11 Patrick Evans has suggested to me a more fully Freudian understanding of Hyde’s relationship with Tothill, in which her traumatic relationship with her father (as expressed in the 1934 ‘Autobiography’) is hysterically transferred on to Tothill, following her exhaustion of the memory of Harry Sweetman.

12 Hyde, ‘Escape’ (The Conquerors), line 1.

13 See for example A Home in this World, pp. 17-18.

'That my thirst shall cry no more': the late poetics of Robin Hyde.

That loosed bird-song, who will ever cage it again?
(Hyde, cited in HBTS, 14)

When food comes, then open your mouth;  
When sleep comes, then close your eyes.  
(Po Chü-i in 'Resignation', Waley 1919, 7-8)

This chapter is concerned with a re-viewing of the ideological and stylistic shift that has been traditionally posited as taking place in Hyde’s poetry after mid-1936, the time leading up to her departure from New Zealand in 1938 and the transition from her middle work to what are usually thought of as her ‘late’ poems. As in Chapter 3, my intention is to overrule earlier critical points of view which have argued for the evolution of a ‘better’ poetics in Hyde’s writing from this time, by providing a more integrated body of analysis by which we can understand Hyde’s late poetry. To do this, I must cast a retrospective eye over Hyde’s work prior to this time in order to draw out certain thematic threads that I have not yet discussed, much as Gloria Rawlinson did in her case for a nascent nationalist poetic in Hyde’s late writing, in the introduction to Houses by the Sea.

My intention here is to turn the critical focus away from the role of New Zealand as an object and an idea worthy of contemplation for Hyde, and consider instead the way in which an increasing number of Hyde’s poems after 1936 demonstrate an identifiable response to another body of work in which Hyde had a growing interest: Arthur Waley’s English language
translations from the ancient Chinese poets. If Malory’s writing provides for Hyde a structure of desire in many of her poems, then Waley’s translations provide for her a framework of contemplation outside of western Christianity and its dialectics with the Byzantine east, a way of constructing and orientating the writerly gaze which is unique and original to Hyde. As well as explicating this gaze I must also politicise it, and show how Hyde makes from Waley’s translations a serious attempt at a personally and politically liberating narrative vision which combines both attention to physical detail and richly allusive metaphoricity. Having established the nature of this literary vision, I will in Chapter 5 consider Hyde’s late prose writings from China, along with some of the poems she composed while there, in order to explore the final, fullest integration of her poetic vision.

‘Go, root for your pearl!’: defining Robin Hyde’s late poetics.

I have alluded in Chapter 1 to the ways in which Hyde’s contemporaries considered her writing after her death, particularly the means by which they reconstructed, often meticulously, her poetic. Allen Curnow asserted in the introduction to his selection for A Book of New Verse 1923-1945 that Hyde ‘began to discover her country, and herself as poet, after she had left New Zealand’ (37). For Curnow, the central problem for poets writing in New Zealand is the lack of a new and apposite poetics—‘anyone capable of poetry, feeling his own land and people, his footing on the earth, to be in any way inadequate, unstable, unreal, is bound to attempt a resolution of the problems
set by his birth' (23)—so it is unsurprising that he places little value on the majority of Hyde's poems which use established forms and rhythms. Curnow claims that '[t]he verse disciplines [Hyde] knew [...] were never adequate to her eager and vigorous imagination' (37), and praises Hyde's post-1936 poetry for the new expressive possibilities he sees inherent in its generally freer forms.

Curnow's words consolidated as well as described the nascent 'tradition' of which he wrote, and we can detect in Gloria Rawlinson's introduction to her collection of Hyde's later poems, *Houses by the Sea*, a subtle aligning of her own views with Curnow's, as I have discussed in Chapter 1. As if responding to Curnow's privileging of Hyde's later poems, Rawlinson suggests the growth of local influence on Hyde's poetical subjects, and, by implication, her forms, by referring to a series of events in Hyde's life following her research trip to Dunedin in September 1936 'at the suggestion of the late Mr Downie Stewart who thought she would find valuable material for her work in the Hocken Library' (16). Rawlinson's detailing of Hyde's subsequent critical thinking is a powerful case for Hyde's adoption of a more localised poetic in the last years of her life:

Letters from Dunedin reflected the direction her poetic imagination was taking: '... as to poetry—right now I want to change from one vein to another—it[']s just dawned on me that I'm a New Zealander, and surely, surely the legends of the mountains, rivers and people that we see about us should mean more to us than the legends of any country on earth.'

And in an article on 'New Zealand Writers' she wrote: 'New Zealand is not a country of flat colours and facts. It is, in everything, subtle and complicated, and the knowing of it a craft as well as an art. It is not easily put on paper ... but if the revelation
is very difficult, it is also certain and individual and by its slowness you may measure its probable depth.’ (17)

The ideas that Hyde is expressing here may be variously interpreted: the importance of privileging local knowledge over knowledge of other cultures, in light of the fact that ‘the legends of the mountains, rivers and people that we see about us’ do not in fact ‘mean more to us than the legends of any country on earth’, or indeed the impossibility of finding a unified cultural vision when the subject’s ‘revelation’ is not only ‘very difficult’ but also ‘certain and individual’ and characterised by ‘slowness’. Rawlinson, however, makes it clear that we are to understand Hyde’s reflections as indicating a shift in her poetics, noting that the ‘desperate groping for background which had started with Check To Your King had now invaded her poetry’ (17) and that ‘[t]he Arthurian knights and historical heroes, even the dream worlds and enchanted islands’ (17) are virtually eliminated from Hyde’s poems, during a time when she is travelling throughout New Zealand prior to her return to, and subsequent departure from, the Lodge at Avondale. The implication is strong in Rawlinson’s introduction that we should read Hyde in her late poems, collected for the first time under Rawlinson’s editorial direction, as fulfilling Curnow’s early claim that the true New Zealand poet ‘is bound to attempt a resolution of the problems set by his birth’ (23) much more completely than Curnow himself believed at the time. This was an effective strategy on Rawlinson’s part: when Curnow made his selection for The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse, published in 1960, all of the five
poems by Robin Hyde which he included were drawn from Rawlinson’s anthology, and were subsequent to the thematic shift which Rawlinson identifies (all but one, from 1937, were written after January 1938).

It is my argument that, while Hyde’s travels around New Zealand in late 1936 were no doubt of importance to her writing, they are not the principal dynamic at work in her later poetry, and that, rather than seeing discontinuity and disintegration in the relationship between her poetry prior to late 1936 and after this time, it is more helpful to see her undeniable shift in focus arising from the decline of her Malorian poetic in favour of a way of seeing whose provenance is less erotic and more intellectual, and whose important source is the translations of Arthur Waley. However, before I begin my exploration of the nature of Hyde’s Waleian poetic, I need first to account for its existence by describing, briefly, the historical evidence.

The culture and politics of China old and new had been of great interest to western intellectuals from the last decades of the nineteenth-century and into the twentieth, up to and including Hyde’s time in the 1930s. The overthrow of the old imperial dynasty in 1911 led to the nationalist government of Sun Yat-sen, which, following its leader’s death in the late 1920s, had gone to war with the communist rebels, whose faction had increased in numbers and influence during the decade. The assertion of Chinese cultural autonomy in such events as the Boxer Rebellion, a siege of the foreign concessions of Peking, threatened the lives of western expatriates in China but failed to stop the rise of oriental studies in western universities,
where the tradition of construction and contemplation which Edward Said has subsequently exposed and critiqued became an intellectual discipline. For writer-journalists such as Hyde, China was a double space of contemplation due not only to the allure of its culture but also to its symbolic importance in the 1930s as a nation resisting fascism in the form of expansionist Japan. When considered in light of the civil war in Spain, where the fascists were also the aggressors, China stood as an important outpost of what was thought to be democratic resistance, its new political traditions at stake as much as its ancient culture. For Hyde, who was a contributor to journals such as *Tomorrow* where the situation in 1930s China was of interest and concern, China embodied that irresistible fusion of ancient and modern which Hyde embraces in her treatment of other traditions such as the New Testament narratives, Malory’s Arthur or the play of ‘legends of the mountains, rivers and people that we see about us’ (17) that Rawlinson cites.

In a reflection written at Avondale in 1934, which Rawlinson cites as part of the scant evidence of Hyde’s poetical theorising, we can see the manner in which Chinese culture was a source of fascination for Hyde, as a locus in which she claimed to find ancient understandings whose nature had long escaped the west. Hyde explains in image-laden prose how

I have not distilled my abstract, perhaps never shall ... I believe that what applies to poetry applies to every art. For me, I need to practice poetic five-finger exercises hours a day, until the fingers of my soul ache. Go, root for your pearl! Rooting may cause pain or weariness, either an emotion—then there’s your pearl, mellow and gleaming, if you only know it when you see it. Your clever subtle fingers will understand then how it should be set. I’ve a feeling that the Chinese understood and practised all
this, centuries ago. But their understanding was never put into words and it’s time somebody did it, if only whilst talking to herself in solitude. That loosed bird-song, who will ever cage it again? Little outwardly-seen, outwardly-drawn poems are not Chinese. No. Like the first porcelain to be manufactured in England after Cathay’s little dim flower faces had proved so successful an adjunct to the gatherings of the West, they are merely, God help them, collector’s pieces—a quaint imitation. But what wisdom, what passion, what shrewd observance and sense of humour lay behind the original flower faces … all distilled, distilled, again distilled, trebly fragrant and potent for that. (14-15)

Even at a time when she was so fully engaged with a Malorian poetic, Hyde sees Chinese culture as able to hold all the articulatory emotion she can throw at it, a place where one may find those *objets d’arts* ‘all distilled, distilled, again distilled, trebly fragrant and potent for that’ into which she seeks to make her own poems, the first ‘put[ting] into words’ of this aesthetic and artistic essence, ‘what wisdom, what passion, what shrewd observance and sense of humour’.

I have argued in Chapter 3 that Hyde’s Malorian poetic reaches its fullest flowering during her residence at the Lodge at Avondale, when the shade of Harry Sweetman gives way to her contemplation of her love for Tothill and its disruptive potential. In my discussion of the poems which come at the end of this period, such as ‘Chrysanthemum’, I have shown how the tensions of Hyde’s Malorian framework are gradually relieved by her acceptance of herself and her speakers as natural women in a natural world, figures for whom transgression is not a failing so much as a fact, part of a cycle of decline and renewal whose example to the female spirit can be found
in nature. It is at this point in Hyde’s literary and historical imagination that Arthur Waley’s translations become of use to her.

Arthur Waley was one of the most prominent literary orientalists of the early and middle twentieth-century who translated into English many ancient and modern Chinese and Japanese texts, and also wrote several biographies and critical commentaries on eastern writers and eastern culture. The two texts by Waley which were demonstrably the most important to Hyde are *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, first published in 1918, and its 1919 sequel, *More Translations From the Chinese*. In his introduction to the 1918 volume, Waley reveals himself to be a scholar caught in changing times. Despite his patronising view of the Chinese as ‘torpid mainlanders’ undergoing ‘centuries of [...] assent’ (3), Waley’s translations construct for the reader a body of work several centuries in the making, whose concerns are identifiably different from the western tradition but still resonant with what in Hyde’s time might have been called ‘humanity’: a discrete imaginative vision which is hermetic enough to signify cultural difference but colloquial enough for the reader to take some part in interpreting. Waley’s translations are full of moments of coincidence with western thought, sometimes in its more radical forms. Thus, in her novel *The Godwits Fly*, which she began while living at The Lodge at Avondale, Hyde’s persona Eliza thinks of Waley’s translation of ‘Woman’, a third century CE poem by Fu Hsüan, in order to sustain herself through the physically and emotionally harrowing experience of being a young woman in hospital:
The new girl’s voice had grown dreamy and mechanical, she had nearly forgotten what she wanted to say.

‘Doctor, I can’t ... oh, Doctor, dear, I can’t ...’ Screens closed right round her bed, wings folding, hard white wings of death.

‘That’s what you get for messing about with married men, me dear.’

‘Yes,’ thought Eliza, ‘And Arthur Waley wrote in his translation of the little Chinese poem,

How sad it is to be a woman,
Nothing on earth is held so cheap. (172-33)

Hyde’s Eliza in The Godwits Fly is her own fictive self; Eliza’s imagination is Hyde’s own, remembered by Hyde. Thus we can posit for Hyde a familiarity with Waley’s translations which began in the 1920s, and which deepened over time to provide for her poetry an imaginative framework broad and deep enough to supersede her Malorian model as that structure became exhausted after 1937. Waley’s poems must, like Le Morte Darthur, be read through multiple layers of mediation: Hyde’s radical social sensibility and her complex, compacted poetics; Waley’s own cultural position as an oriental revisionist who is also a custodian of imperialism; and the secrets of the poets and their poems themselves, doubly distant in time and space, ultimately locked away in dialects with which Waley’s readers were largely unfamiliar.

The above discussion, then, is my attempt to position Waley’s work in a cultural position negotiable for early twenty-first century readers, as well as considering something of Hyde’s cultural relationship to his work. Waley, born in 1889, was a generation older than Hyde, but his work comes
to represent for her a viable imaginative and emotional alternative, within a modernist framework, to the forms favoured by her contemporaries—both the aspiring nationalists of New Zealand and the social realist poets in Britain. A consideration of the dominant ideas in Waley’s translations, followed by a return to the moment in Hyde’s poetry when her Malorian bonds begin to loosen and give way to the new, will enable me to proceed to a discussion of the fullest flowering of Hyde’s Waleian poetic, those late poems of hers which were so admired post mortem.

‘Soon, how soon her golden ghost was born, / Swiftly, as though she had waited for us to come’: reading the Chinese poets.

The first part of Waley’s 1918 volume One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems consists of translations from a wide variety of poets, over a variety of historical eras, and includes a sequence of twelve poems by T’ao Ch’ien, whose concerns are typical of the wider body of translations: family and friends, work, responsibility, separation, and, finally, death. In the sequence’s final poem, ‘New Corn’, the speaker anticipates the view from a nearby mountain. The subtext here is surely that of imminent death, but the text proffers neither resistance nor surrender to this notion, but simply a kind of internal stillness that comes from the dignity of deliberate action mindfully undertaken, and the observation of the perpetual movement, the continual changing, of the surrounding landscape:

Swiftly the years, beyond recall.
Solemn the stillness of this fair morning.
I will clothe myself in spring-clothing
And visit the slopes of the Eastern Hill.
By the mountain-stream a mist hovers,
Hovers a moment, then scatters.
There comes a wind blowing from the south
That brushes the fields of new corn. (1-8, complete)

This contemplative wisdom is also the characteristic mood of the poems by Po Chü-i which Waley translates as the second half of this volume. Much of Po Chü-i’s literary imagination is taken up with thoughts of his long-absent friend, Yüan Chen, who had worked in different parts of the country from his friend since the two were young men. The trajectory of separation and loss which characterises the friends’ relationship is immediately identifiable as resembling those losses which Hyde felt had brought her such suffering: the loss of Harry Sweetman and, two years later, the decision of Hyde’s friend Gwen Hawthorn to marry rather than pursue the career as an artist which Hyde wanted her to take. But Po Chü-i’s response to his separation from his friend is notably different from the misery and bitterness that Hyde plays out in her Malorian-inflected poems whose ghost is Sweetman, and the Chinese poet’s emotional reckoning of his situation was to become, as we shall see, an important model for Hyde.

‘The bond that joined us lay deeper than outward things; / The rivers of our souls spring from the same well!’ (11-12, 1918, 105), wrote Po Chü-i to Yüan Chen when the two were in their twenties. In ‘Dreaming of Yüan Chen’, from Waley’s 1918 volume, Po Chü-i describes how his friend now ‘lie[s] buried beneath the springs and your bones are mingled with the
clay' while he is still 'lodging in the world of men; my hair white as snow' (5-6). This directness, this lack of euphemism, is absolutely characteristic of Po Chü-i's poetry and an important part of the oeuvre which Waley has translated. The dead poet's words speak instructively across time and across culture to the struggle for ownership of memory and of self that characterises the writing of Hyde's Malorian period. At the time of writing 'Chrysanthemum', however, the poem which is crucial to understanding her shift away from Malory and towards Waley, Hyde's poetics was not yet so resonant with Po Chü-i's contemplation of mortality. Indeed, the festive abandonment of 'Chrysanthemum' retains that reckless, typically Hydian spirit that Curnow in 1960 called 'incurably exhibitionistic' (1987, 168).

In Chapter 3 I concluded my discussion by showing how Hyde in poems such as 'Consent', 'Fragment' and 'The Duellists', while retaining the gendered tensions of the Malorian struggle for knightly supremacy and maidenly submission, moves more and more towards a structure of ideas in which the natural world is first the moderator, and then the arbiter, of imaginative existence. This change in Hyde's poetic is paralleled by her departure from Avondale, following the departure of Tothill. It is in this change in Hyde's poetic that the influence of Waley's translations first appears. This takes place in two distinct ways: first, in the incorporation of images and allusions either specific to, or evocative of, eastern culture, and second, in Hyde's increasingly frequent poetical adoption of a philosophical attitude whose tenets mirror those of the poets of Waley's translations.
‘... all distilled, distilled, again distilled [...]’: Robin Hyde’s Waleian poetics.\(^5\)

One of the first poems to signal the changes Hyde goes on to make to her poetic is ‘Chrysanthemum’, from *Persephone in Winter*. As I have shown in Chapter 3, this poem celebrates fallen female sexuality as a nature-centred source of deep confidence and exuberance, out of which the speaker addresses her companion, whose mock-‘fate’ is ‘to love me most’ (15) instead of one of the ‘[m]any [...] springtime maidens, crisp as snow’ (13). It is the presentation of this female self that was most important to my argument in Chapter 3, as it demonstrates the ways in which Hyde was by late 1936 beginning to move away from the central tenets of her Malorian poetic. Yet beneath the joyful exuberance of the speaker, this ‘stubborn slattern of your garden bed’ (4), is detectable another kind of cultural currency altogether, an allusion to another culture and society whose prior claims to the chrysanthemum are posited as an alternative, though ghostly, source which may contest the western construction of femininity which the poem’s speaker implicitly rejects.

Hyde’s speaker makes ‘bittersweet / Admission that my hour must needs be fleet’ (5-6), going on to elucidate her autumnal condition in metaphors increasingly obscure:

\[
\text{A frosty tang of wit, an autumn face,} \\ 
\text{Perchance the memory of some sharper grace,} \\ 
\text{That shone beneath the imperial yellow tiles} \\ 
\text{Nor needed stoop for princely sulks or smiles} \quad (7-10)
\]
What Hyde’s speaker evokes here is the original court where the chrysanthemum flourished; geographically and historically distant from Arthur’s Camelot, it is imperial Japan, or even its antecedent in ancient China. Hyde’s syntax is ambiguous here; she may be evoking the actual ‘sharper grace / That shone beneath the imperial yellow tiles’, or, even more distantly, it may be only ‘the memory of some sharper grace’ (my emphasis) which acted as the submerged feminine counter to the masculine oligarchy’s ‘princely sulks [and] smiles’.

Hyde’s position here is notable for standing contrary to the orientalism demonstrated by scholars such as Waley, who claim to speak for eastern culture. Here, Hyde has taken advantage of the great cultural, as well as temporal, distance between her speaker’s time and the ancient regimes she evokes, to present a state of feminine difference which, she implies, may be apprehended, if only momentarily, throughout history. The ‘sharper grace’ which she obscures even as she cites it is as much an irregularity of the old imperial court as the speaker’s confidence in her own difference is in the present moment. Hyde uses cultural difference to evoke a history of sexual difference, skilfully playing on the double distance of present-day speaker and temporally distant imperial courtesan from her addressee to remind her listener that those marginalised in gendered culture wars may yet retain their voices, whose memory, though submerged, persists.

This material incursion, then, is the way that the culture which Hyde accesses through Waley first appears in her poetry. To call this a
Waleian poetic is not to say Hyde agrees with Waley’s own cultural position in which the ancient Chinese are ‘torpid mainlanders’, largely submissive and empty-headed, but rather to continually draw attention to the medium through which Hyde’s access to Chinese culture is necessarily mediated. Yet, as we see even from the four-line example in ‘Chrysanthemum’, Hyde’s appropriation of Waley’s cultural scenario is always dually-directed; she simultaneously revises her source as she revises the content of her own work.6

‘Chrysanthemum’ uses Hyde’s typically flexible rhyme scheme in a poem of an uneven number of lines—traits all seen in poems where her Malorian inflections are stronger—but is also notable for what became a feature of Hyde’s later poetry: irregularly stressed lines of irregular length. In this, as in other poems which I shall discuss, Hyde seems to be ventriloquising the free verse of Waley’s translations from the Chinese, where emphasis is not on retaining the formal rhythms of English verse (as it was in H. A. Giles’s late nineteenth-century translations of Chinese poetry into English) but rather on retaining some of the original rhythms and tone stresses of the Chinese original.7 Thus, in ‘Chrysanthemum’, we find words whose irregular, percussive quality reflects the irregular shape of the ‘dishevelled head’ of the chrysanthemum itself: ‘stubborn slattern’ (4), ‘Tatterdemalion courage’ (11), ‘hapless sir’ (14). Hyde’s adoption of a Waleian poetic coincides with her increasing use of more flexible rhythms and more variable line lengths. It is thus more helpful, in terms of the new interpretative model I am here constructing, to view the formal shifts in
Hyde’s poetry after late 1936 as coming out of this shift away from Malory and towards Waley, rather than as a natural result of what Curnow and Rawlinson argue is Hyde’s increasing attention to New Zealand subjects.

‘Chrysanthemum’ uses one of the icons of the ancient east to construct a poem whose provenance is personal, yet expressed in terms of a distant culture. In an unpublished poem from 1935-36, ‘The Nettle’ (AU 364.1), Hyde’s speaker recalls a dream which leads into a meditation on her own penitence. The poem is in free verse, with irregular line length, and resolves, with a grim steadiness of mood, on an epitaph which preaches the same kind of withstanding and acceptance that Waley’s speakers, familiar with the Tao and the tenets of Mahayana Buddhism, express. Hyde’s speaker is more personal, regretful, and indeed hysterical than her Chinese counterparts who contemplate their own end, but her means of reflection, of focussing on individual features of a local landscape, is imitative of the earlier poets. Just as Po Chü-i mocks a traveller’s claim to spiritual insight by claiming for himself the status of Bodhisattva in the late poem ‘Taoism and Buddhism’, translated in One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems, so Hyde’s speaker presents the wrongs she has done against her lover as a deadly parody of Christian conduct as set down in the Bible:

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   Traveller, I have studied the Empty Gate;
   I am no disciple of Fairies
   The story you have just told
   Is nothing but an idle tale.
   The hills of ocean shall never be
   Lo-ti’en’s home.
   When I leave the earth it will be to go
   To the Heaven of Bliss Fulfilled. (Po Chü-i, 9-16)
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Yes, I think it was because of wrongs I did you
Secretly in thought, never bragging before the world,
Never set like ranged flint arrows between our faces,
But planted by dark of the moon, a bed of simples
To which the skald from time to time repairs
And brews him venom he does not think to use,
But mutters against the sky, grown shrill and curious,
Scarecrow and devil, out of jealousy. (Hyde, 11-18)

It is in the concluding lines to 'The Nettle' that Hyde most fully demonstrates her growing affiliation to the sentiments of Waley's translations. The calmness with which her speaker devises her own epitaph is resonant with the late poems of Po Chü-i, where he considers his own death or reflects on the loss of his family and friends. What binds these historically and culturally different texts together is their quality of acceptance and indeed resignation, a state of mind that in Waley's translations brings liberation and which has been absent from, and indeed alien to, Hyde's poetry thus far. This Taoist, Buddhist, Chinese quality provides Hyde with an alternative to the psychological, spiritual and sexual struggles of her earlier work, removing from her poetry the Christian struggle between good and evil, elevation and condemnation, that was so ingrained in her memory as a result of her own experience. In 'The Nettle', Hyde's speaker begins the journey towards the contemplative acceptance that leads Po Chü-i in 'Resignation' to write,

Better by day to sit like a sack in your chair;
Better by night to lie like a stone in your bed.
When food comes, then open your mouth;
When sleep comes, then close your eyes. (5-8)
Against this, we can see how Hyde’s speaker’s words imply the first steps on the same journey:

Write then upon my gravestone, ‘This is given
To whoso takes the nettle
With what lies under the nettle.’
And write, ‘All weeping is for a little time,
All palms very soon are empty
Whether of scars or kisses.
But the wheat has heirs of his body,
There is no son of the nettle.’ (22-9)

The consolation for the damaged self speaking in ‘The Nettle’ is its non-continuance and the promise of eventual exit from a world where, ‘when I offer my heart, I offer a nettle’ (19).

Po Chü-i wrote ‘Resignation’ at the end of a life which lasted more than seven decades, while Hyde looks to the solace of not-being at the much younger age of twenty-nine or thirty; a certain amount of sophistry is thus required to claim for Hyde the same restful spirituality that Po Chü-i willingly enters into. Another poem by Hyde, ‘Thirst’, from Persephone in Winter, recognises that the world-weariness she speaks of in ‘The Nettle’, though a useful strategy for enduring what is difficult, must necessarily give up its subtextual hope of the grave if life is to be anything more than irritably passed by. Thus, ‘Thirst’ takes the intellectual drive that ‘The Nettle’ turns into acceptance of emotional exhaustion, and addresses the artist’s perennial problem: the debilitative quality of the creative quest. In this poem, Hyde’s speaker remains within her new Waleian poetic, as she announces her intention to take refuge in the status quo, newly-seen and newly-experienced:
I have had much good from the dusk; much good and ease
From the lamplit street.
For I am one must gather much to his heart
Or ever he find life sweet,
And must walk with many alone, and the thing called strange
Winnow from look and touch,
Ere the fang in my heart be loosed, and the angry thirst
Shall tear not overmuch. (1-8)

The speaker here has attained the kind of unpalatable self-knowledge that
T’ao Ch’ien expresses in ‘Blaming Sons’, from One Hundred and Seventy
Chinese Poems, when he asks ‘If Heaven treats me like this, / What can I do
but fill my cup?’ (13-14), and, like T’ao Ch’ien, has adopted an attitude of
acceptance, indeed, self-acceptance. Hyde’s speaker has long passed up the
opportunity to forego the alienating experience of social and intellectual
difference—or indeed sexual difference, as expressed in Hyde’s Malorian
poetic—and chooses instead to embrace her own course. Later in the poem
she allegorises her experience as a kind of ‘Persephone’s Choice’,
suggesting decisions made without full knowledge of their consequences,
which must subsequently be borne with good humour, lest the possibility of
insight be foregone:

I have seen a man cup fruits in his hollowed hand,
Pomegranate-red and gold;
I have seen the black cars scourging the servile streets
As the chariots lashed of old. (18-21)

Hyde’s speaker has moved beyond considering the attitude of
others to her conduct and her attitude. However, if we return to T’ao
Ch’ien’s verse, specifically his second poem in One Hundred and Seventy
Chinese Poems, we find the same position as Hyde's articulated, this time in the story of a meeting with a stranger. Here, the speaker is as adamant as Hyde's: the life that embodies difference, once adopted, cannot be abandoned. This is its own virtue and its own reward:

In the quiet of the morning I heard a knock at my door:
threw on my clothes and opened it myself.
I asked who it was who had come so early to see me:
He said he was a peasant, coming with good intent.
He brought a present of wine and rice-soup,
Believing that I had fallen on evil days.
‘You live in rags under a thatched roof’
And seem to have no desire for a better lot.
The rest of mankind have all the same ambitions:
You, too, must learn to wallow in their mire.’
‘Old man, I am impressed by what you say,
But my soul is not fashioned like other men’s.
To drive in their rut I might perhaps learn:
To be untrue to myself could only lead to muddle.
Let us drink and enjoy together the wine you have brought:
For my course is set and cannot now be altered.’ (1-16, complete)

Though less dramatic in execution, the message of T’ao Ch’ien’s poem is here the same as Hyde’s: the speaker’s irrevocable intention to live outside convention, for the sake of embodying what he believes to be his nature. T’ao Ch’ien’s delightfully understated assertion that ‘To be untrue to myself could only lead to muddle’ (14) is replicated, with considerably more drama, by Hyde in ‘Thirst’. Here, the speaker desires for herself a trajectory of fullness of life, of the special participation that is the prerogative of the outsider and whose excess is, the speaker claims, the only thing that will set aside the irritant craving to do something other than ‘wallow in the mire’ (10) of commonplace aspirations, as the peasant of T’ao Ch’ien’s poem puts it.
Hyde's speaker thus demands of all the varieties of experience, the 'chariots lashed of old' (21):

Ah, let me die with their full gaze pressed on my eyes,
With their full weight bent on my door,
With their stake of cities driven into my heart,
That my thirst shall cry no more. (22-5)

Hyde would yet have the opportunity to 'live in rags under a thatched roof' (7), as T’ao Ch’ien's peasant describes him; in the years following this poem she lived in subsistence conditions both at home on the North Shore and abroad, in China and England. In these years the trajectory that ends with her own demise becomes less important to her, as she engages with the physical difficulties immediately to hand. But here, it is sufficient to note that in 'Thirst', Hyde is expressing a writerly position whose provenance is fully Waleian; in her own register and with her own imagery she makes the claim for her own artistry that T’ao Ch’ien does: ‘[...] my soul is not fashioned like other men’s / [...] / [...] my course is set and cannot now be altered’ (12, 16). It is from this Waleian model that Hyde continues to draw strength for her writing and models for her ontology, until in her last poems she is writing in a manner quite different from transitional poems such as 'The Nettle' and 'Thirst'.

It would be unfair to call for a setting aside of Rawlinson's interpretative model if I were to pay no attention to the poems she chooses as exemplars in her version of Hyde's stylistic and imaginative shift. Rawlinson finds in Hyde's poem 'Red Berries' a moment of 'sudden conviction' which
illustrates the way in which Hyde’s ‘desperate groping for background […]

had now invaded her poetry’ (17). Does ‘Red Berries’, then, fit within a
Waleian poetic? Can it be viewed in a manner other than as part of Hyde’s
‘discovery’ of the local from 1937? I would like to suggest that the change
most important to ‘Red Berries’ and other poems like it is not the shift from
the imagined to the local, but rather the shift from activity and allegory to
stillness, from searching to contemplation.

Hyde’s Malorian trajectory took her, as we saw in Chapter 3, from
the emotional prison of the Lodge and Tothill’s care, as allegorised in
‘Astolat’, to the open spaces in which ‘the grasses and I lie stilled in love’
(‘Consent’, 6). Having moved away, both literally and imaginatively, from a
space of allegorised emotional conflict, Hyde in ‘Red Berries’ takes
advantage of the possibilities for contemplation inherent in her new
imaginative location as a writer-outsider immersed in nature, a ‘stubborn
slattern of [a] garden bed’ (‘Chrysanthemum’, 4). Thus, we may interpret the
speaker’s exuberance in ‘Red Berries’ as coming from the newly-
contemplative subject’s delight in her first explorations of a point-of-view
gained from Hyde’s increasing immersion in a Waleian poetics, rather than
seeing it as an overdue coming into the local of a New Zealand writer’s gaze.
The poets Waley translates also find sustenance and delight in the familiar
flora and fauna among which they live. This sustaining power of nature itself
Hyde extrapolates as the ‘[s]urprise in the wilderness’ that the berries give
her speaker. Nature and the local are abundant consolations for the writer
whose ‘soul is not fashioned like other men’s’ (T’ao Ch’ien 2, 12):

O, red berries, red berries!
Surprise in the wilderness,
Coral on dark green dress.
Nay, don’t tell me she’s blank,
My own land; she makes things—
Insects like sticks, insects with leaf-shaped wings,
Wise fishes, no-winged bird—
Surprises so absurd
They leave the singer dumb,
A stockfish for a word,
One word, wherewith to thank
These quaint, as from her crucible they come. (1-12)

Similarly, Po Chü-i writes of a comparable set of concerns in a pair of poems, translated in One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems, whose preoccupation is seeing, and the act of seeing, and the quality of seeing that restores to the speaker a sense of scale that diminishes the power to trouble inherent in their own problems. Hyde’s version of this is almost microscopic in scale (‘Bright impudent bobbins, half the size of cherries, / But twice as tasty for her wild-wood pigeons’ [22-3]), and is answered by the broad vistas in Po Chü-i’s pair of poems, ‘Climbing the Terrace of Kuan-Yin and Looking at the City’ and ‘Climbing the Ling Ying Terrace and Looking North’:

Hundreds of houses, thousands of houses,—like a chessboard.
The twelve streets like a field planted with rows of cabbage.
In the distance perceptible, dim, dim—the fire of approaching dawn;
And a single row of stars lying to the west of the Five Gates. (1-4, complete)

Mounting on high I begin to realize the smallness of Man’s Domain;
Gazing into distance I begin to know the vanity of the Carnal World.
I turn my head and hurry home—back to the Court and Market,
A single grain of rice falling—into the Great Barn. (1-4, complete)

Hyde’s experience of what Po Chü-i calls ‘the smallness of Man’s Domain’
or ‘the vanity of the Carnal World’ is gained not at a distance like the earlier
poet, but from hard emotional difficulty and close inspection of nature’s
exclusive processes. ‘Red Berries’, like Po Chü-i’s ‘Climbing’ poems, is an
essay in looking, and the contemplative pleasures of looking; pleasures which,
stripped of sexual desire, worldly ambition, and imaginative struggle, are of
the least troubling kind.

Hyde was known by her friends as at times almost in love with the
geography and botany of her own country; her enthusiasm is reflected in her
prose in the healing power of such land-identified figures as Macnamara in
Nor the Years Condemn. I have tried to show that there is more at stake in
‘Red Berries’ than merely a poetical arrival at enthusiastic expression;
beneath this is a deep structure of contemplation as a more-than-adequate
alternative to struggle. In another New Zealand-themed poem, ‘The Karaka
Trees’, published in Persephone in Winter but written earlier,9 Hyde extends
the scope of this contemplation to hundreds of years, reaching back towards a
land uninhabited by humans, in a gesture typical of her time.10 The effect of
this is not only to make mystical the New Zealand past, but to extend the
imaginative tenancy of Hyde’s contemplative Waleian poetics back to a time
before poetry—around the time the Chinese poets whom Waley translates
were flourishing. Where she elsewhere found struggle, Hyde here finds
silence, among ‘the locked house of the karaka trees’ (31):

Under the roof of the karaka trees,
The firm green thatch of leaves,
No wind wanders, nor sound, nor restless light
Flits like an amber bird among the boughs,
No star walks, a pilgrim secure and pale,
Through the dark house of the karaka trees. (1-6)

Though she imagines hidden faces, towers, and a fatal, ghostly lover who consumes her bridegroom, Hyde’s main preoccupation here is ancienctry: stillness, silence. ‘If you have not exhausted the scope of seeing and hearing,’ asks Po Chü-i in ‘Having Climbed to the Topmost Peak of the Incense-Burner Mountain’, from One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems, ‘How can you realize the wideness of the world?’ (13-14). Po Chü-i speaks from the top of the mountain where ‘My eyes were blinded, my soul rocked and reeled. / The chasm beneath me—ten thousand feet; / The ground I stood on, only a foot wide’ (10-12), a point of view whose height is matched in density by Hyde’s karaka trees, where

none shall say
What laughter and what loveliness lie dead,
What passing struck the lustre from the leaves,
Barred out the sun, stifled the song of birds,
People with ghosts this palace of the trees. (16-20)

It appears, then, that Hyde has in her New Zealand-themed poems honed the contemplative’s gaze to the kind of stillness Po Chü-i argues for at the highest point of the Incense-Burner mountain. But we have also seen how, though Hyde directs her thinking towards the kind of stillness which permeates Po Chü-i’s last poems, her age and her imaginative energy are not
yet at the point of stillness that is the product of Po Chü-i’s long life, quiet retirement and religious culture. The development of this point of view, which Hyde thought of as uniquely ‘Chinese’, as we saw from her theorising on poetry as the distillation of an abstract, is the most notable, most important and most original feature of Hyde’s later poems, and the thing which most strikingly confirms the importance of Waley in her late poetics. Hyde’s poetry after 1937 moves increasingly from activity to stillness, from anxiety to contemplation and from enthusiasm to empathy. This shift away from the intricate, highly literary schema that informed Hyde’s Gnostic and Malorian poetics is what made her later poems seem more accessible to her contemporaries. The exuberance of such poems as ‘Red Berries’ belies the nascent stillness of mind, part of Hyde’s new Waleian poetic, which informs the speaker’s gaze.

‘When this superintendence of trifling affairs is done’: ‘White Irises’ and ‘Young Knowledge’.11

Rawlinson’s advocacy of her selection of Hyde’s poems was, as I have discussed in Chapter 1, highly successful, and subsequent anthology selections of Hyde’s verses almost exclusively favoured her late work, following the example of Curnow whose 1960 selection I have mentioned earlier in this chapter. Two poems (which Rawlinson dates as late 1936-1937 and which Leggott puts slightly earlier as written between late 1935 and July 1936), ‘Young Knowledge’ and ‘White Irises’, are among the most frequently selected as indicative of Hyde’s literary style. These poems, which
come from the same period of Hyde’s career as ‘Red Berries’, show how quickly and how fully a Waleian poetics was at work in Hyde’s poetry, and are important to my argument because they are such lengthy exponents of the results of Hyde’s newly contemplative position.

Under the pressure of her Malorian poetics, Hyde offered highly-wrought poetical scenarios which were consistently introspective, tragical and often violent. Her Malorian poetics functioned as an arbiter of loss, a slow leaking of the consequences of the emotional abuse which was at the heart of Hyde’s erotic subjectivity in its Malorian form. ‘Young Knowledge’ and ‘White Irises’ are quite different. Both poems are still deeply writerly, with clusters of ideas and images which require repeated readings to be fully apprehended, but both look to an emotional and intellectual landscape which is drawn from things exterior to their speakers. In Hyde’s Malorian poems, the gaze looks endlessly inwards, into imagination and memory and the facility of the poet’s mind as it invents and explains loss upon loss. In ‘Young Knowledge’ and ‘White Irises’, the trajectory of the poet’s vision is ever outwards; imaginative realms are rendered as physical places and the poet’s interpretative gestures are made in the same manner as Po Chü-i interpreting his surroundings in the mountain-climbing poems cited above, where the relation between the large and the small is explored in order to return to the speaker some sense of peace and spiritual perspective.

Indeed, both these poems resonate with the idea of an external journey, where the speaker gleans new understanding from an imaginative, or
even physical excursion. In this, they are companions to many of Waley’s translations, where the journey made by the speaker brings new knowledge of ambivalent value. In ‘Dreaming That I Went With Li and Yü To Visit Yüan Chen’, from *More Translations from the Chinese*, Po Chü-i describes how

Yüan Chen was sitting all alone;
When he saw me coming, a smile came to his face.
He pointed back at the flowers in the western court;
Then opened wine in the northern summer-house.
He seemed to be saying that neither of us had changed;
He seemed to be regretting that joy will not stay;
That our souls had met only for a little while,
To part again with hardly time for greeting.
I woke up and thought him still at my side;
I put out my hand; there was nothing there at all. (7-16)

Knowledge of a more expedient kind is suggested in ‘Song’, by Tsang Chih, translated in *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*. Importantly, the speaker’s erotic awakening is gained by looking out to the world, and not inwardly, to the imagination:

I was brought up under the Stone Castle:
My window opened on to the castle tower.
In the castle were beautiful young men
Who waved to me as they went in and out. (1-4, complete)

A literal expression of the writer’s metaphorical position is provided by Tao-yün, a general’s wife, in ‘Climbing a Mountain’ (also from Waley’s 1918 volume), when she asks

Times and Seasons, what things are you
Bringing to my life ceaseless change?
I will lodge for ever in this hollow
Where Springs and Autumns unheeded pass. (7-10)
Here, a speaker much earlier than Hyde appears to be articulating that desire which Hyde saw as unique to herself, the quest for a creative and spiritual ‘home in this world’, whose absence is the fault of the social conditioning that surrounds gender and sexuality. Waley’s notes tell us that Tao-yūn’s husband was ‘so stupid that she finally deserted him’ (81).

Hyde’s speaker in ‘White Irises’ stands in a spring garden where she first attempts, and then abandons, a valediction. We see in the poem’s opening the speaker’s belief that she has lost control of her resolve to live, a situation which Hyde herself encountered more than once:

But when it came to holding fast
All my heaped days as water went,
Breast-high in swirling dreams I stood,
With vain hands clutched the slipping past
Of straws and faces on the flood. (1-5)

Though the speaker sounds as if she is not waving, but drowning, it is quickly revealed that she is not in the sea at all, but in what appears to be an orderly spring garden. In chains of original, fragmentary images, the speaker goes on to articulate an ontological and imaginative position which is a resolutely outward-looking fusion of garden and sea, and which seeks images of the inner mind in the flowers and grass around her which themselves imply whole histories of culture and experience. Thus, when ‘single among stones I saw / The white, the ragged irises, / Cold on a sky of petals dead’ (6-8), the speaker experiences these flowers not as indicative of her own mental chaos, but as a tableau in which the irises, the garden and the dusk become a great church. The geography the speaker describes suggests that she is presiding,
communicant with her own vision, while the ‘young cheeks’ of the chorister irises are ‘roughened in the wind, / White-surpliced boys, a pale line spread / With the deep nave of dusk behind’ (9-11).

Hyde’s speaker in ‘White Irises’ thus takes on the Buddhist position of the abandonment of craving, or clinging, by which she is able to extrapolate her own turbulent emotions and relieve them of their power to annihilate her. Her juxtaposition, following the lines quoted above, of the chaos of the garden at high tide with the liturgical chanting of the floral choirboys is a remarkable and deeply original extension of the gaze conceived in poems such as ‘Red Berries’ and ‘The Nettle’. It also goes a long way towards filling Hyde’s own prescription for good poetry, quoted earlier in this chapter. We may say of the irises and the spring garden in this poem what Hyde herself said of Chinese porcelain: ‘what wisdom, what passion, what shrewd observance and sense of humour lay behind the original flower faces’ (Rawlinson, 15):

Over their feet the spring tide bore
In green, impatient, uncurbed grass,
High bellows flecked with daisied foam.
I saw the wind, a swimmer, pass
From grey-girt isles of cloud, his home,
And mount the blue stockades of trees.
O then a singing on the air,
Caught and flung back and held again,
Curled in the rosy shells of rain
And pressed against earth’s listening ear
Took up the triumph-strain.
Cold boys of spring, the irises
With parted lips stood chanting there,
The green flood restive to their knees,
Rain powdered on their hair. (12-26)
The speaker here is equally dependent on the whimsy of her images and the mortal, religious character of her experience. Thus, the choirboy irises fidget as the ‘spring tide’ of the grass and wind disrupts their chanting. Yet the temper of their message must be something close to the poem itself, a psalm to the unexpectedly restorative action of giving into one’s mental chaos, since the speaker finds in their singing sufficiency to withstand the evil of the day. There is, after all, she explains, no valediction to be made, and no redemption to be had. ‘White Irises’, a self-generated poem, turns out for its speaker to be self-generating:

And I who sought for heart’s farewell
In dusk of spring, have brought you these—
The choir singing in a spell,
The white, the ragged irises. (31-4)

The speaker of ‘White Irises’ knows that as long as she immerses herself in the world, she cannot withdraw from it. The conception and execution of this poem are remarkable; in its presentation of a collage of original images, underpinned by a relentless tetrameter which reflects the anguish of the speaker, it deals unflinchingly with a moment of crisis whose provenance is obscure but whose exposition shows how Hyde is as much master of the outward as the inward gaze, an expansion that could not have occurred without the consolidation of her Waleian poetic.

In ‘Young Knowledge’, a deeply ambitious poem of medium length, we can see in a different manner the substantial nature of the changes the influence of Waley’s translations brought to Hyde’s poetics. Whereas in
the poems most influenced by the structures Hyde drew from Malory, the principal aim of the speaker is to define her sexual subjectivity and devise an an eroticism predicated on the gendered dynamics of Malory’s narrative, the speaker in ‘Young Knowledge’ looks towards an exterior ideal by which she may ‘distil[…] my abstract’ (Rawlinson, 14) and harvest some of the fruit brought by her ‘need to practice poetic five-finger exercises hours a day, until the fingers of my soul ache’ (14). The idea of ‘knowledge’ in ‘Young Knowledge’ is thus under considerable pressure, and what remains with the reader is not Hyde’s exposition of her idea, but the deeply literary means by which it is achieved. Thus, knowledge is called ‘[a] mare in foal, who pastures with dew eyes, / Cropping the grasses of a certitude / By many seasons sweetened for her sake’ (2-4), ‘Old vine on walls, thick-jointed, stiff with knots’ (25), and, most memorably:

[...] a thunder in the night,
Huge claps of mirth, a frightened woman flung
Over the bed in oil-lamp’s yellow gleam;
One half your soul an awe of burning blue,
One half your life a flower of burning flesh,
Touch her and laugh, whisper the comfort-things;
While still the leaden sky is great with child
And adder flashes dart against the pane. (52-9)

This last, extraordinary image infuses the quotidian, the birth of a child, not only with violence but with humour, or at least the report of humour, as well: ‘Touch her and laugh’ (57). There is a complexity about this vision that has moved beyond the singular images of loss, desertion and mortal conflict that dominated Hyde’s Malorian poetics.
The imaginative power and technical control which Hyde demonstrates in 'Young Knowledge' proceeds from the outward-looking, deeply contemplative thinking she practised in poems under the influence of Waley's translations. This poetical coming of age, with the increased confidence it must surely have brought, is perhaps why about half the stanzas in 'Young Knowledge' are explicitly concerned with images drawn from New Zealand's recent colonial, or pioneering, past. Hyde seems, in 'Young Knowledge', to have arrived at a place from which she feels competent enough to attempt 'the knowing of' New Zealand, which Rawlinson tells us Hyde called 'a craft as well as an art', of which 'if the revelation is very difficult, it is also certain and individual [...] ' (17). In 'Young Knowledge', we have a remarkable demonstration of that certainty and individuality at play. Thus, Hyde plunders the history of her culture to encompass the extremity and exertion that exposes, here in gothic images, the physical and mental antecedents of a society in Hyde's time approaching its centenary:

Big words like bloodshot smoke behind old houses,
Loud bells like fishwives clattering their news,
The loneliness of rocks where ships went down,
Black horse that broke his heart to reach the post,
The fool who fell too soon, or lived for failure (84-8)

In her attention to psychic and historical detail, Hyde duplicates the feat she would perform in Nor the Years Condemn: ventriloquising, without sentiment, the beliefs and emotions of the working man:

Knowledge is all that grasps and breaks and strives,
The flat tide flowing red between the mangroves,
The little evil roots that suck in mud,
The broken faces; all the broken faces
That put together makes the mask of knowledge. (94-8)

What your hard soles have taught you, and rough hands,
What your wet eyes have dealt with, and tight mouths,
What your bewilderment gave you, and hot heart,
That only is your knowledge. Take and bear it.

And die at last, like nettle in the ditch,
And burn at last, like gorse across the hills,
Because you stung the cloth and pricked the proud,
And are a bane to what shall come hereafter,
This also, is your knowledge; take and bear it. (109-17)

The mental seriousness and technical care with which Hyde applies her poetical imagination to her own culture, and the relatively late period in her career during which this application came to textual fruition, make her a writer whose work was surely 'a bane to what shall come hereafter'. The concluding stanza of 'Young Knowledge', which begins by describing how 'Kauri they split with wedges, when too vast / The grey trunks rose for any ripping-saw' (118-19), demonstrates Hyde's awareness of how the difficulty of her verse is also the source of its integrity. The intense thought Hyde brought to her interrogation of Christianity, the imaginative empathy with which she valorised history's gendered victims as subjects in search of gnosis, the care and skill with which her Malorian poetic was developed and the opening-out of this schema to the influence of Waley's translations, with their inherent manifesto of contemplative mindfulness, lead to the complexity and emotional truth of the revelation presented, in different ways, in both 'White Irises' and 'Young Knowledge': that insight found need not
ruthlessly be brought into the cultural mainstream, that there is sometimes wisdom in remaining silent.

Hyde’s concluding description in ‘Young Knowledge’ of Heaphy’s discovery of the Greenstone People presages the experience of reading this poem itself at a sixty-year (or more) remove from its writing. Hyde’s message in ‘Young Knowledge’ is one of contemplative withdrawal, of the necessity of extended meditation to uncover, or construct, any meaning. Just as Heaphy is unwilling to expose his discovery to the transformative light of the public gaze, so ‘Young Knowledge’ itself ends with this awareness: hesitation, ambivalence and incompletion are the end states of writing and of knowledge, and not their declarative opposites:

Where Heaphy, climbing, found the Greenstone People, 
Saw the wide nets wash out in thundering surf 
Too huge for the canoes, drawn in by moonlight; 
Watched the brown women drying out inanga 
For fodder in the nights of eaten moons 
When wind prowls round the thatch with thievish fingers; 
Saw the marled greenstone littered on the ground, 
And how they fine the edge with whalebone drills—
And turned away at last, and climbed the ladder, 
And standing on the clifftops, saw their smokes 
Final steam up, blue parting of a dream. 
There standing on the clifftops weighed his knowledge— 
The thin precarious weight of early knowledge— 
And staring in a sun, half steeled his heart 
To tell the cities there was no such world. (148-62)

This, then, is the final thing that makes ‘Young Knowledge’ such a fine poem, a triumphant end-product of Hyde’s Waleian poetics. It escapes the modernist or social realist constraints of Hyde’s literary times by refusing
to resolve the tensions its consideration of knowledge has uncovered. In short, it has within it that same quality of outward contemplation that motivates Po Chü-i to reduce all experience to restful sitting, broken only by the necessary actions of sustenance. In this lies the cessation of craving: ‘When food comes, then open your mouth; / When sleep comes, then close your eyes’ (7-8). In the final chapter of this thesis, I shall show how Hyde’s Waleian poetic becomes a sustaining part of her understanding of her experiences in China, and how we see in her last poems, together with her final prose volume *Dragon Rampant*, the final form of Hyde’s compelling imaginative vision.


These poems were: ‘The Last Ones’ (1937, Rawlinson 84), ‘Pihsien Road’ (1938-9, 139), ‘What is it Makes the Stranger?’ (1938-9, 141), ‘The Deserted Village’ (1938-9, 144) and ‘Prayer for a Young Country’ (1938-9, 150).

Po Chü-i, ‘In Early Summer Lodging in a Temple to Enjoy the Moonlight’ *(Waley 1919)*, lines 17-18.

Hyde, cited by Rawlinson in *Houses by the Sea*, p.15.

We can also see this in my earlier example of Hyde’s use of Waley in *The Godwits Fly*: where the original poem was written by a man to be read by men, and not as an agent for social change, Hyde’s Eliza uses the couplet ‘How sad it is to be a woman / Nothing on earth is held so cheap’ to condense the experiences of women in hospital, herself included, into a larger social allegory that is agitative in temper and implicitly calls for something to be done.

See Waley’s notes on ‘The Method of Translation’ in his 1918 volume, pp.19-20. Although it is Waley’s stated intention to depart from Giles’s method, his bibliographical note on p.21 cites Giles’s *Chinese Poetry in English Verse* (1896) as a volume that ‘[c]ombines rhyme and literalness with wonderful dexterity’.

Matthew 6.1-4:

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

‘The Karaka Trees’ was written during Hyde’s residence in Wanganui, 1929-30, and thus anticipates the changes that Rawlinson identifies as coming from Hyde’s travels in 1936, and which I attribute to her increasing interest in the themes of Waley’s translations. I am grateful to Michele Leggott for supplying me with information regarding the manuscript sources of Hyde’s poems.

It was the tendency of Pakeha writers in the 1930s and 40s—even those such as Hyde who advocated the rights of the indigenous people, the Maori—to look back in their work from a moment of late-colonial or post-colonial subjectivity to a time of emptiness. This of course reflects these writers’ limited knowledge of Maoritanga, which was only a minor feature in Pakeha writing of this time. An example of this process may be found in the opening of John Mulgan’s *Report on Experience*, where the Maori appear as recently-arrived ghosts whose impact on the whenua is negligible.

‘Accepting Summer’: Robin Hyde in China¹,²

They will think they are right, and know they were wrong. They will justify themselves completely, and the man who does that accuses himself. He is his own prosecutor and his own defence, and when he has done clamouring, there is the wheat to judge him, and the testament of ground and sky. *(Dragon Rampant, 270)*

In Chapter 4 I continued my exploration of Hyde’s poetics by arguing for the influence on her writing of Arthur Waley’s translations from the Chinese. We have seen throughout my thesis the ways in which Hyde can be understood from the start of her writing career as a writer whose imaginative and intellectual control over her material was exemplary, and that it is most helpful to understand the style and concern of her late poems as arising organically, rather than disjunctively, out of her earlier work. Just as Hyde herself moved from location to location throughout her writing career, so her work ranges widely across a variety of concerns, both literary and political.

While Robin Hyde’s last unpublished poems remain in the Challis Collection and are thus not part of the general critical discourse concerning her writing, we have in her last prose volume *Dragon Rampant*, along with the published poems produced after 1938, a body of work that demonstrates how, in the last two years of her life, Hyde in her writing achieved a confluence of metaphorical, imaginative and political structures that reveal her, again, as a writer of special insight and ability. We have seen how a trajectory may be plotted through Hyde’s literary concerns, by way of her poetry, in which the
heretical revisionism and Gnostic allegorising of her early and middle work gives way to a flowering of her Malorian poetic during her time at the Lodge at Avondale, until the internationalism that Mary Paul has identified as operating in Hyde’s 1938 novel Nor the Years Condemn is reflected in the Waleian inflections of Hyde’s work as she exhausts the scope of her Malorian inheritance.

Whether by chance or unconscious intention, Hyde’s departure from New Zealand in January 1938 brought her not to Europe via Japan and Russia as she had intended, but to mainland China itself, the geographical home of the historical poets translated in Waley. The difficult and sometimes extreme circumstances of the Sino-Japanese war provided for Hyde the setting and subject matter for the writing she produced both on the road in China and later in London. The 1939 prose volume Dragon Rampant is the most substantial of these and is complemented by the published poems of this time. It is my intention in this chapter to explore the imaginative and technical qualities which make Dragon Rampant, along with a selection of poems contemporary with it, such a notable text, both in the context of Hyde’s poetics and as a piece of international political writing. Hyde’s memoir of her experiences in China reminds us that literary strategies exist for the political writer that need not work reductively on the experience of the Other. Her narrative makes emotional sense of the struggles of the local people in the Chinese communities she visits, and offers a message to the west not only of consolation, but of transcendence, in the figure of the Harvest Bird.
‘A world-mind divided’: the stranger’s subjectivity. 3

*Dragon Rampant* is Robin Hyde’s account of her departure from New Zealand in January 1938 with the intention of travelling to Britain, her early detour into China and her subsequent experiences there. China in 1938 was a country in peril, struggling on various fronts in an undeclared war with Japan, a fascist nation engaged in expansion, as I have noted in Chapter 4. Japan occupied the disputed province of Manchuria in 1931 and by 1938 controlled a further five of China’s northern provinces and was engaged in warfare on several fronts in an effort to control southern and western China. China’s communist and Kuomintang, or nationalist, parties, which had previously fought a civil war against each other, united under the nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, 4 who had abandoned a policy of appeasement in order to resist further incursions. While the communists under Mao Tse-tung and commander-in-chief Chu Teh fought a guerrilla war in northwest China, the nationalist armies defended the eastern and southern coasts and the southeastern interior.

The literary and cultural followers of the left in New Zealand were well aware of the Japanese threat to Chinese autonomy. As I have mentioned in Chapter 4, this was a topic of concern for contributors to and readers of *Tomorrow*, for example. Hyde in her 1938 poem ‘Shiplights’ (published in *Houses by the Sea*) relates something of this feeling of anxiety and unease in her description of a nautical encounter with a ship of hostile provenance. In
Hugging the Queensland coast
There passed us, Saturday night,
Bare half a mile to port
A ship tricked out in light;
Swung up, shuddered and jibbed,
Like a rearing horse;
(And the Chinese boy stared out,
Watching her course.) (1-8)

There is the same sense of uneasy anticipation and tense expectation in the opening pages of Dragon Rampant. In her description of her final thoughts while preparing to leave New Zealand, Hyde highlights the paradoxical ephemerality of local identity in the face of the militaristic, monolithic World Powers through whose territories she will soon travel, in a narrative of transition and unease which foreshadows the subjective and physical uncertainties of travelling through contested waters: ‘Quite soon now, early in January 1938, I am leaving New Zealand: in spite of all the reiterated congratulations, I don’t want to go’ (17).

The contrast between the private, interior world of ‘New Zealand’ and the rest of the world in Hyde’s opening narrative is like the difference between the unsettling intimacy of the ship which passes by in ‘Shiplights’, ‘Melting into her destined wave / As woman to lover’ (11-12), and its hostile origins:

So in clipped stiff English I asked
[What ship, what manner of man?]‡
And the Chinese boy, watching on,
Said, a ship of Japan. (25-7)
I was alone and out walking on New Year’s Eve. For three weeks I had been staying at a place I liked, but had had to leave in the ordinary way of business. Behind it was a road, dark bushy grounds on one side, and on the other blue gums, stubble, and stream, until it came out by a grey, hard-running level of sea. One cottage, on the stream side, stood isolated. It looked old-fashioned and small, with chimneys like wooden legs, and its windows showed no light. (DR, 18)

Hyde writes into her journey to China, both in poetry and prose, the experience of having to turn her private memories and experiences of home into a part of the discourse of the international subject in which she has become the stranger: ‘Nothing would persuade [Mr Chang] that a New Zealander was more than a small and lonesome kind of Australian, like a Tasmanian. […] “We Australians,” he said, more than once, “must stick together”’ (58). Hyde is well aware in her poetry of the ways that the status of the western subject is compromised in a place like China where it is she and not the locals who are ‘other’ and ‘foreign’. In the poem ‘What is it Makes the Stranger?’, later published in Houses by the Sea, she makes very clear her awareness of the dangers of taking received attitudes with her, and reveals herself as someone ready to interrogate the concept of ‘stranger’ itself:

Because I was journeying far, sailing alone,
Changing one belt of stars for the northern belt,
Men in my country told me, ‘You will be strange—
Their ways are not our ways; not like ourselves
They think, suffer and dream.’
So sat I silent, and watched the stranger, why he was strange.
(2-7)

In ‘Fragments from Two Countries’, also published in Houses by the Sea, Hyde plays with the relationship between language, culture and memory,
emphasising the ways in which cross-cultural encounters can erase difference at the same time as they establish it. Thus, Hyde covers in this poem the same territory as she does in her opening narrative of the local in *Dragon Rampant*, describing how, ‘[i]n the days before tempest’ (57),

I dream so much of the poems made in my youth.
Small idle ghosts I had written, forgotten, never since seen,
Slip into my brain; say, ‘We are part of you,’
And swiftly are gone again.
A soft night carries us on. (58-62)

We see then the awareness that Hyde takes with her into China, an awareness which is political as well as cultural, as she coolly acknowledges in her ‘Introduction’ to *Dragon Rampant*, which shares with other contemporary western writings on China a grim, pragmatic understanding of the realities of economic expediency:

A world-mind divided, a democracy, like the American democracy, the victim of occasionally sincere demagogues, always good-heartedly ready to listen to their sentimentality, their vague plans and ideals, may perhaps stand. But while it remains the prey of so many leeches, how can it frighten even its stupidest enemy into the idea that it has enough vitality to move? Its idealism flows in one direction, its munitions and oil supplies in another. (13)

What then might save China? Hyde’s answer suggests something of the contemplative stillness she demonstrates in her Waleian poetic. However bleak the situation, she suggests, the empathy of the serious-minded individual may yet be enough. It is an idealistic position, but one tempered by the writer’s awareness of the sustaining power of ideas, if not ideals:

Can foreigners, other than those in a position to sell
munitions, money, and supplies, do anything to help China, beyond the natural will to costless kindliness? Certainly, if they have any faith in China. Since I don’t speak of mystical faith, but of the faith of man in man, before faith there must be understanding. And what may be found, perhaps, in this book—an effort towards understanding. (13)

In the heart of the reed is a secret,
In the heart of the green bamboo, a spear;
In the heart of a boy is ‘Chee-lai, chee-lai!’
They will take a long time, ere they crush out these. ('Fragments from Two Countries', 24-7)

"'Will we really have to handicap ourselves by taking this along?'": Hyde and the China correspondents.

Although Hyde travelled alone, her detour into China brought her in contact with a well-established community of writers and journalists, most of whom were itinerant, independent correspondents like Hyde herself. Hyde’s attitude to these writers is interesting, as it shows an awareness of the way in which their work on, and indeed presence in, China, is conditioned by points of view which are in no wise subject to the dismantling gaze that she turns on her own attitudes. Of Christopher Isherwood’s war diary, published with poems by W. H. Auden as Journey to a War, Hyde wrote to Allan Irvine that Isherwood had ‘written of China as from Clapham—the Far East delusion and the instinctive colour difference, I suppose […]’ (28 March 1939, cited in Boddy & Matthews, 133). Isherwood was, later in life, more frank about the range of his activities in China than at the time he and Auden wrote Journey to a War, but a brief comparison between Isherwood’s
description of being caught in an air raid in Canton, and Hyde’s description of a different bomb attack on the same city, reveals tellingly some of the ways in which Hyde’s perspective was different from the mainstream of the intellectual left:

At this moment, we were deafeningly interrupted by the air-raid sirens. They were just outside the window. Mr. Tsang [the mayor of Canton] became almost unintelligible with amusement; he shook violently in his chair: ‘You see? The Japanese come to dlop [sic] bombs on our heads! We sit here. We smoke our cigarettes. We are not afraid! Let us have some tea! (35-6)

On the death of hundreds of women and girl workers in the Japanese bombing of a sewing factory in central Canton during celebrations for a Chinese victory, Hyde writes how,

As the sparks from their torches, trailing back, rained gold into the blackness of the Pearl River, so were the bodies of these women and girl children brushed into blackness from the history of their race ... sacrifices innocent, untimely and unknown. It was done, neither can any act of vengeance or pity in the future alter it, nor anything intended as reparation ever overset the marking of that work. So let it be said, and so left. (167)

Hyde has long shown in her poetics the potential contained within the status of outsider for special insight. Here, she reaches across the barriers of language that so confound Isherwood, to apprehend something of the enormous suffering that is in the context of the war a mere paragraph in narrative, a burnt factory, a cheap coffin. Whereas Isherwood describes how the well-meaning tourist, the liberal and humanitarian intellectual, can only wring his hands over all this and exclaim: ‘Oh dear, things are so awful here—so complicated. One doesn’t know where to start’ (153),
Hyde reaches beyond the ineffectiveness of what she calls ‘costless kindliness’ (13) to a position of imaginative empathy, where the dead women and girls and ‘the men of the City of Rams’ who ‘lift[ed] their coffins to shoulder-height, while other men spaced between them slowly lifted the great lanterns and torches of victory’ (167) simply occupy her narrative, constructed as respectfully as possible: ‘So let it be said, and so left’ (167).

Another writer with whom Hyde engages to telling effect is the American socialist sympathiser and professional feminist, Agnes Smedley. Smedley had worked in Germany organising birth control clinics before travelling to China in 1928. She eventually affiliated herself with the communist army, whose politics she admired, and travelled with them in northwest China. While writing *China Fights Back* (which details her journey from Yenan to the north China front and thence, injured, to Hankow) which was published in 1938, she was suffering from a back injury and was carried prone on a stretcher by soldier-attendants. In her foreword to this volume, Smedley asks fellow Sinophile and activist Anna Louise Strong to edit her manuscript, with the anxious instruction ‘do not make it “literary”’ (14). The resultant text thus captures, to numbing effect, the heavy weather of Chinese life:

The misery and misfortune of China! Floods, famines, droughts, wars! Poverty indescribable, and the people always on the verge of starvation. Can you conceive of the disasters of a war when even in peace time the Chinese people live on the verge of starvation? The rich may not suffer so much, but 95 per cent of the people will suffer dreadfully and countless of them will die. (23)
While Hyde waits in Hankow to see if she will be granted permission to travel to the front near Hsuchowfu, she interviews Smedley. Hyde’s description of this interview is open in its perspective, and it is by subtextual steering that she manages both to praise Smedley for her partisan commitment and to mock her for having long-since forgotten the subtleties of polite human interaction:

That was a queer interview, as I arrived with a huge bouquet of wistaria [sic], acquired from one of the pleasant-faced coolies who squat chattering in front of the Lutheran Mission, and couldn’t think of anything to do with it except present it to Agnes. She kept looking at the flowers as if she expected them to turn into string sandals, munitions, or a small donation for the Orphans’ University in the north-west. But in spite of her preoccupation, she convinced me ... as she would have convinced anyone ... that no foreigner in Hankow, male or female, could exercise a more vitalizing influence over the fence-sitters who couldn’t make up their minds whether or not to cash in with ten dollars. She was as effective with Chinese factory-hands or engine-workers as with bishops. She had even got the British consul down. (176)

Smedley’s bluntness and unmitigated directness are implicitly contrasted by Hyde with the kindesses, small and large, of the local people who help and accompany her in her travels. Thus, her journey in cramped conditions by train to Hankow is presented as a joyful experience through Hyde’s careful attention to the detail of her companions’ care:

Mr. P. Koo had some business along the corridor, and Mrs. Koo and I could only bow and smile, she speaking no word of English, nor I of Mandarin. So the Inspector made the running, and, discovering that I was a New Zealander, asked as if on our trains men and women were allowed to sleep together.

I said: ‘No,’ adding hastily, ‘But we all think it’s very old-
fashioned."

'Well,' contemplated the Inspector, 'not in China either ... not until this war came.'

There was a quiet, golden-smiling optimism about him which removed him a little from this world, as he sat dangling long trousered legs from his top berth. Even when apologizing, he was bright. He apologized for the train.

'It is very little and very dirty,' he said. 'We had some good trains, especially for this line ... very up-to-date. But now we have taken them off and hidden them away, in case of damage. It is because of the bombs. The journey, however, is no longer very dangerous, because most of the dangerous section we run through quickly, by night. In the morning, we are too far away for the Japanese to get in. Oh, yes, I can guarantee that.'

He beamed, and Mr. P. Koo, a young man with a face so exceptionally thin and pointed that, for a Chinese, he looked delicate, came back and struggled to raise the window. We pulled up in blowing darkness, a few yards from a small station.

'That has all been done to-day,' said the Inspector, thrusting his head out like a tortoise. 'When I came down this afternoon everything was level. They have been using some good big bombs. I must go and see.' (146)

Hyde shows in this passage her instinctive respect for the local people, together with her awareness of the importance of politeness, and gestures kindly meant, even in extreme conditions. In 'What is it Makes the Stranger?', she expresses it thus:

Heart, lowlier, said, 'There is a way of patience—
Let ear study the door to understanding.
Mouth, there is silence first, but fellowship
Where children laugh or weep, the grown smile or frown,
Study, perceive and learn. Let not two parts
Unwisely make an exile of the whole.' (78-83)

We see in verses such as this how Hyde's writings from China draw on and indeed consolidate the plethora of ideas which inform her poetics prior to her time in China. The remarkable degree of consideration, empathy
and thoughtful care that Hyde brings to her experiences in China is anticipated by the many empathetic impulses we have seen in her earlier writing: towards the oppressed, the maligned, the excluded. What makes Hyde’s China writings so important in this regard is her awareness of the instability and indeed the multiplicity of such constructions; that where cultural difference is a primary consideration, the potential for communication of real value and lasting impact is possible because the cultural ‘givens’ that separate individuals one from another are subject to destabilisation. It is because of this that her China narratives are characterised by gentle care, by focussing on individuals and their narratives rather than taking part in the large-scale politicking of foreign nationals such as Smedley. This contrast is even stronger when Hyde’s writings are considered alongside those of Smedley’s compatriot, Anna Louise Strong.

Strong is more of a rhetorician than Smedley, and her textual call-to-arms in her 1939 volume *China Fights For Freedom* reveals her as someone whose politics are constructed according to a blend of first-wave feminism and one-world utopianism. Despite her long residence in China, Strong’s discourse is unequivocally that of the west:

One-fifth of the human race is to-day fighting for freedom. They are yellow-skinned farming folk on the other side of the earth, defending their homes, their women and children, their hope of life. Yet so is our world knit together that they fight also for you and me, for the peace and freedom of England. Not only for their own fate and their children’s future, but to save your son from war. (1)

Strong makes it clear that she believes it necessary that the liberal-minded
west act on behalf of the 'yellow-skinned farming folk' she would defend. The impulses that drive such an appeal are a well meant response to a very real situation, and come with some possibility of success if, as Hyde herself asserts, 'Most of the pleasant and kindly people in western democratic civilisations want China to win' (11). The problem here, of which Hyde is aware and Smedley is not, is that the peasants on whose behalf Strong hopes the west will bring diplomatic and economic pressure are permanently subsumed by any number of discourses: American, British, Japanese and the many regions of China where they live the traditional life under partisan control. Thus, says Hyde in the poem 'Ku Li', published in *Houses by the Sea*, 'The new vernacular chronicles exhort him, / And waste their breath' (7-8). Hyde's verses reveal that the peasant's subjectivity, so vigorously contested at so many levels in so many cultures, is itself a fictional construct of the literate, unavailable to the rural labourer himself:

His grinning face can't know  
Half the fixed meanings of the flags he saw:  
He had a happy childhood; then time caught him,  
Broadened his shoulders, but forbore his head. (9-12)

Thus the many factions that would control the peasant's consciousness labour in vain. The conscripted soldier remains, ultimately, cannon fodder, gone to ground and absorbed, as part of the labour force of both peacetime and in war, back into the agrarian foundations of the culture whose factions struggle to own his name:

Turns to Yunnan, hacks the next strategy through,  
Cheerful; and often killed; and always bossed.
And not on Tiger Head or Purple Mountain
His grave-mound rises: worlds live on, to slake
Their ashy gullets at his bitter fountain
Of blood and vigour. Enemy armies break
Somehow on this, as somehow cracks the stone
Under his pick: but now he rots alone
(Not claiming to have died for something's sake,)
Only the earth makes ready for his bone,
The green rice sees him with unflattering eyes:
Too cheap a partisan for man to prize,
Men seldom know him for their broadest river,
And burnt in the immortal tiles forever. (20-33)

We can see here how the highly wrought fusion of extended inner reflection
and the broad sweep of Hyde's historical and political imagination produce a
poetics which is in many ways the creative fulfilment of the politicised,
intensely imagined poetics that informed such Waleian poems of Hyde's as
'White Irises' and 'Young Knowledge'. Hyde's long experience as a writer
and journalist combined with her constant attention to expanding and
developing the technique and imaginative reach of her poetry mean that she is
perhaps the best-equipped of any of the freelance western writers in China to
deal intelligently and indeed comprehensively with the complexities of her
experiences. Her work is an important complement and implicit commentary
on the high profile polemics of writers such as Smedley and Strong, since she
has the particular ability to see in another culture, as well as her own, the
difficult dynamic created by the compacting of ideology and the individual
subject.

The insight that illuminates Hyde's poetry and prose written about
China seems to have proved little use to her in situ; without an affiliation to a
named publication and without the diplomatic contacts which so aided writers
such as Isherwood and Auden, Hyde comes up more than once against the
prejudiced cabal, the closed shop, of foreign correspondents. She describes
the experience of waiting in Hankow for a pass to the front as a time which
grows increasingly gendered:

Dr. Li’s oncoming attitude towards the idea of giving me a pass
for the front had faded, from an initial polite regretful puce to a
grim pallor. Somebody among the reporters or on the publicity
staff, I never knew which, had strongly advised him against it.
(172)

Hyde’s real enemies in this regard are not the Chinese bureaucrats, but her
male colleagues. Hyde’s presence and enthusiasm seem to shame them:

The matter slid into a minor topic of discussion with the
foreign men reporters. Already I was the only woman at the Press
meetings, the larger Wuchang conferences ... the only girl in the
Pa Ta Chia world, and representing, when all was boiled down to
cold fact, such a small bunch of periodicals, not even dailies, in
such a distant corner of the world.

The one thought of the foreign men reporters (fighting,
themselves, for their chance to get into khaki shorts and shirts,
sling cameras over their shoulders, and happily label themselves
‘For the front’,) was, it became plain, ‘Will we really have to
handicap ourselves by taking this along?’ They had been so
cheerful, so breezy, on that first afternoon! Now the breeze blew
cold. (172)

Though Hyde says of such hostility, ‘It was not serious, but it was
prickly’ (172), her understated words make clear what was at stake. Indeed,
this is one of the few occasions on which Hyde willingly lets the full yoke of
gendered difference rest on her shoulders, instead of transferring it to her
poetical or fictive voicings. While she does not exaggerate the extent of her
exclusion, neither does she play it down, allowing herself to be identified and reduced to the word ‘this’: a woman, a colonial, and, moreover, lame. Hyde’s narrative here is an important corollary to Isherwood’s tale of privilege guiltily indulged, in his account of his own earlier journey to the front, together with Auden and the Australian expatriate journalist, Peter Fleming:

Fleming eyed the copses for signs of game and delighted us by exclaiming: ‘How I wish I had a rook-rifle!’ Our preliminary defensive attitude towards him—a blend of anti-Etonianism and professional jealousy—had now been altogether abandoned. He, on his side, confessed to a relief that we weren’t hundred per cent ideologists: ‘I’d expected you two to be much more passionate.’ Laughing and perspiring we scrambled uphill; the Fleming Legend accompanying us like a distorted shadow. Auden and I recited passages from an imaginary travel-book called ‘With Fleming to the Front’. (214)

While Hyde tells her story of travelling to the front as the lowest in a hierarchy of aspirant heroes, Isherwood’s companion Fleming effectively turns the surrounding landscape into a Little England, fuelling Isherwood’s bewildered amusement, which is at times barely suppressed. Isherwood was of course an outsider to the dominant political and literary discourse in other ways, but his textual response is to elide his difference rather than allow it play as Hyde does when she notes such detail as being lifted bodily by a Chinese soldier into a moving train—‘Seizing me triumphantly by both legs, he waved me aloft like a banner for a moment, then tipped me head foremost through the window […]’ (199)—or having to alight from the same train further up the line: ‘Certainly I can’t jump; so I throw my handbag and coat into the sand, dangle for a moment, then drop. The white sand is quite easy
and pleasant' (202). We can see from these extracts, along with those cited above, the way in which Hyde includes herself in her narrative, effectively surrendering as many of the privileges of the authorial position as she can, in order, as Linda Hardy suggests, 'to dissolve her own voice, as if to let this other world speak through her, within the limits of her fragmentary and partial “hearing” of it' (xvii). This of course is a technique similar to the self that is reeled in as it runs out in 'White Irises', or the narratorial self-effacement that rewards the peasant with his marginal subjectivity in ‘Ku Li’, cited above. Hyde puts this notion another way in another poem from Houses by the Sea, ‘The Silent’, in which she asserts that ‘Halting among your grasses, I / Trace no commandment from your sky / “Be thou different!”’ (9-10). This narrative positioning, in all its variations, is what makes Dragon Rampant such a special text and Hyde the formulator of an important poetics. We can see this in yet another light when we compare Hyde’s position of no privilege but much insight with the omissions and retractions of another young western writer in China: the Rhodes travelling fellow, James Bertram, a New Zealander (and one whose article on Hyde, ‘Robin Hyde: A Reassessment’, I discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis).

Bertram and Hyde met in Hong Kong and were, after Hyde’s departure from China, friends in Britain; they shared a sense of political and emotional commitment to the Chinese. Hyde was later envious when Bertram returned to China from London, while she was still a patient at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases, to which Bertram had helped secure her admission.
Prior to his return to the east, Bertram had assisted Hyde in preparing her proofs for *Dragon Rampant*, correcting, as Challis has put it, 'her Chinese place names and her Chinese politics' (24). Bertram himself had arrived in China in 1936, loosely commissioned to write on China for the benefit of the west. A 1937 volume *Crisis In China* was followed in 1939 by *Unconquered*, subtitled *Journal of a Year’s Adventures Among the Fighting Peasants of North China*. Despite his undeniable political awareness and intellectual commitment to the Chinese cause, Bertram demonstrates in this volume a dandified sensibility, in which the east is so much of an exotic metaphor for the west that this conceptual relationship stifles his attempts to write politically.8

The limits of Bertram's textual praxis are made tellingly apparent when his descriptions of horror and violence are placed alongside Hyde's. Hyde has long been an expert in writing of other kinds of horror: the ontological and epistemological struggles which produce much of the poetry discussed in this thesis; the many petty difficulties of her own experience of poverty and incarceration; and the multiple miseries of the New Zealand community, divided and shamed by war and economic depression. In China, however, she reveals her self as a writer with an unflinching eye, never stooping to sensation or effacement and in expert control of the way in which context must inform text for her narratives of suffering to have emotional traction. Bertram, in contrast, reveals a polite averting of the authorial eye:

*Now, as we watched the station entrance, Japanese guards emerged with a group of youthful Chinese. Boys and girls in*
rough country clothes, they still kept the unmistakeable air of intellectuals. Students probably.... They were marched off under escort.

They had been unlucky. We felt sorry for the girls. *(Unconquered, 68)*

The two unseens were Japanese rapes, one over seventy, one a young married woman, daughter-in-law of the first. The son-husband was with them a month before, when they came close to a band of soldiers: both women had bound feet.

The raping of the old one seemed queer: the scrawling, perhaps, of a very plain signature on a letter to an elusive man who keeps refusing to accept one's letter. Or else the Japanese soldiers were drunk, and wanted to bait an old, black scarecrow, skewered terribly between green wheat, blue sky. Sometimes, Bushido notwithstanding, just that happens, the savage baiting of old helpless women.

The old woman was still in hospital, because drunk or sober, the Japanese had knocked her about very badly. The younger one because, after a month, they still weren't sure if she was pregnant, and her husband, quite untouched, was hanging about declaring that he didn't want any Japanese babies. *(DR, 216)*

The honesty and compassion of Hyde's descriptions of suffering is a product both of her political sensibility and her textual strategy; as Linda Hardy has noted, *Dragon Rampant* is a project in erasing the 'I' of narrative, in which 'Hyde [...] is trying to dissolve her own voice, as if to let this other world speak through her' (xvii). For Hyde, China is not a story to be told to the reader; rather it is a series of events, told in part, which themselves only point or gesture towards the culture and people they refer to. Thus, writing must be as honest and selfless as possible, in order that the reader may experience the writer's mediated observations with as little encumbrance as can be achieved. Thus, where Bertram reveals certainty, commitment and authority, Hyde reveals hesitation, unease and empathy. We see this in her
description of refugee camps in Shanghai:

It was the city [refugee] camps I minded, especially [...] a tenement camp in a rotting, lightless old building, where the pale children looked up, as if fungus should suddenly be presented with eyes and little crying mouths. They did not merely cry, they shrieked when strangers came down the dark ladders, because they lay all the time in the dark, and the outside world was a dim dream to them, holding voices and movements of which their senses were afraid.

And there, too, women lay with their jackets open over their breasts, and gave suck to infants for whom Life itself said in the rustling voice of a serpent: ‘Death.’ (92-3)

Hyde thus lays no more than the lightest of interpretative frameworks on the material she records. In contrast, Bertram, like other political writers, proceeds in his narrative towards a final strategic extrapolation of meaning for his reader:

Between the beginning and the end of a war ... It is where we all stand, in these days when democracy is on the defensive in three continents, when only the enemies of peace seem able to combine successfully. And the common people of China, could we of the West but realize it, are fighting our battle. Efforts have been made to betray them by ‘friendly governments,’ as the people of Spain have been betrayed by governments in Europe that called themselves democratic. But the Chinese people—and it is one of the few beacon fires of hope upon the international horizon—are still unconquered.

They have found at last the way of resistance, and the way to freedom. And it is to China the world must look today for the fullest expression of that spirit of human endeavour which never yet, over the longest years, has known defeat [...] (328)

Bertram’s words were among the most optimistic expression of political commitment in a setting whose western followers seem to have been characterised by self-interest rather than selflessness, as Hyde’s description cited earlier, of how so many reporters were ‘fighting, themselves, for their
chance to get into khaki shorts and shirts, sling cameras over their shoulders, and happily label themselves "For the front" (172), suggests. Although notably limited when compared with Hyde’s more expansive literary technique, Bertram’s literary sensibility is still more altruistic than the majority view, expressed by his friend the American journalist Edgar Snow, that ‘only imperialism can destroy imperialism’ (1937, 451).

Yet Hyde too is no naïve idealist. In a poem published in *Houses by the Sea*, ‘Sweeping the Gutter Clean’, she reveals her understanding that political endeavour may sometimes only reveal the intractability, and the inevitability, of the suffering of society’s most downtrodden. Thus, though

Sweeping the gutter clean  
For ever and in vain,  
Men in straw cloaks and hats  
Bare-legged, swish through the rain;  
Pushing great brooms of twig; (1-5)

their labour is mocked, not only by the immediate filling of the gutters, when ‘Mocking the backs of these men, / Second and filth and spittle fall again’ (7-8), but also when their worthy labour does not keep from their household the greater degradations of violent death:

Later, downing their dress  
Shanks bare as their own,  
The midnight man goes forth  
Stopping by blackened tusks of stone,  
Sweeping the mortal household  
The sacrifice  
Whose timeless agony did not suffice,  
Pushing a broken broom, he goes alone. (9-16)

Though Smedley writes of ‘The misery and misfortune of China! Floods,
famines, droughts, wars!’ (23) and Strong describes a Chinese prisoner whose ‘eyes, ears, nose, were burned away and his whole head was blacked with flame’ (3), it is Hyde’s sensitive account of how the pressure of events brings an unhappy ‘deciding / How flesh shall spurt from sinews, brain from bone— / Crushing desolate grain with a harder stone’ (‘Pihsien Road’, 8-10), that goes the furthest towards giving textual substance to Bertram’s generalisation of what it means to stand ‘[b]etween the beginning and the end of a war […] in these days when democracy is on the defensive in three continents’ (328), in a literary subjectivity that is both the summation and the culmination of the intensely insightful and independent poetics whose growth and change have been the subject of this thesis.

‘[...] what about the rhythm? Nobody ever gets the rhythm!’: Hyde and how the west meets east.

We have seen from the above discussion how Hyde’s writing in Dragon Rampant and in her poems from China reveals her as a westerner with a unique textual perspective on China, in which she acknowledges the perpetually partial nature of her own understanding while at the same time trying to limit the interpretative reach of the narrator’s ‘I’, in order to expose as fully as she can her experiences. To everything she sees, particularly scenes of extreme violence and suffering, she brings the imaginative empathy that has from the start of her literary production characterised her attitude to the downtrodden and the maligned. It is telling that one of the Chinese phrases Hyde learnt to use in the mission hospital where she stayed in
Hsuchowfu was 'Your pain is my sorrow' (cited in *HBTS*, 27), and that many of her poems about her experiences in China are concerned with that society's most lowly members: the peasant of 'Ku Li', the old refugees in 'Pihsien Road', or the women who have fled 'The Deserted Village', a poem which I will discuss later in this chapter. In her dealings with western diplomats, officials and fellow-writers, however, Hyde is in a different position, as she is revealed time and time again to be the lowliest, an encumbrance, as we saw in her description of the correspondents anxious that she not travel to the front with them, because of her gender and her lame leg. Hyde's accounts in *Dragon Rampant* of her dealings with individual westerners are important, since it is in them that Hyde is able to interrogate further the question she poses in the poem 'What is it Makes a Stranger?' The answer, it seems, is as complicated in intra-western relationships as it is in encounters between the east and the west. The ways in which Hyde reveals herself and her occasional companions to be strangers, or indeed, just strange, to one another, are an important part of the way in which *Dragon Rampant* is a project pitched against the forces of ethnocentrism and orientalism, which, as we have seen, so inform other writers' work at this time.

Hyde's friend Bertram came to be known in his home country as a 'friend of China'. His return to China in 1939 was part of a trajectory by which he eventually spent some years as a Japanese prisoner of war, and on later visits to China in the 1960s and 70s he was entertained by senior government officials. Bertram remained a friend of Mao's American
apologist Edgar Snow, as well as Snow's later-estranged wife Peg, throughout his life, and titled his 1993 memoir *Capes of China Slide Away*, which itself is a line from one of Auden's Chinese poems. But China when Hyde visited it had already a New Zealand advocate for its people, the Canterbury-born expatriate Rewi Alley, who organised with the help of Snow the covert manufacture of arms and ammunition that helped China resist Japan during the expansion of the regional conflict into global warfare. Hyde met Alley in Shanghai in 1938 and was shown around the refugee settlements and battle sites by him; it is from an account of one of these trips that her description of the women and children refugees, cited above, is drawn. Hyde describes Alley as one who, 'like every foreigner who tries to learn anything about China, instead of drawing grand bird's-eye conclusions [...] was learning piecemeal, by way of pebble and dropped leaf and syllable' (71). It seems that Alley's cultural sensitivity is rather differently developed from Hyde's, as she explains, noting of her above remark that Alley

wouldn't have put it like that, because he had a horror of anything saving the romantic and the dramatic, and it nearly assassinated him when somebody put on a Chinese gown [...] or picked up a Chinese opium-pipe and blew out a few puffs, and thought that this, in some obscure manner, was a shattering compliment to the Chinese. (71)

Hyde and Alley’s relationship is thus characterised by miscommunication and misapprehension, which seems to have resulted in a full-blown argument. To the Rawlinsons, Hyde wrote that

[...] I'm sorry to have to confess that I got caught on one of those nails you so earnestly warned me about. Oh yes, I remember and
say to myself, 'Watch, keep quiet, don’t let the thread catch on a nail'. Well, I’ve quarrelled with R.A. hopelessly, irretrievably—not the kind when I used to stamp out of your front door and ten minutes later creep in the back. Oh no! And all over those bluebells and primroses. (cited in HBTS, 23)

In *Dragon Rampant* this experience is turned into metaphor, yet still seems to suggest a clash of manner rather than matter:

He rather thought at times that I was working up the romantic and dramatic street, and I didn’t know how to contradict, couldn’t come back with any politically purposeful repartee. So I either orated or stumbled, as usual, but without clarity. Caley naturally damned the sentimental with the romantic and the dramatic, but he couldn’t keep down his abrupt compassion for the very poor ... for individual faces suddenly looking up, under the foot that presses and kneads the very poor. (71)

Hyde thus reveals herself as initially unable to muster any defence of her position which Alley seems to have attacked. Yet through a complex series of subtextual allusions, Hyde points in *Dragon Rampant* to her awareness, though subtextual and perhaps even unconscious, of some of the ways in which Rewi Alley was not all he seemed. Hyde uses in her volume the alias ‘Caley’ to refer to Alley because, as she wrote to Allan Irvine, ‘although at present he’s in a free province, there’s no knowing when he may want to go back to Shanghai, or some other occupied area’ (28 March 1939, cited in Boddy & Matthews, 76). It is as if, in *Dragon Rampant*, Hyde has chosen ‘Caley’ as Alley’s alias not only because it sounds like Alley, but because it sounds like ‘Waley’.

We know from Chapter 4 of this thesis the extent to which Arthur Waley was an important figure for Hyde, due to his translations of the ancient
Chinese poets whose verse forms and ideas she so loved, but her treatment of Waley in *Dragon Rampant* is quite different. In a passage which occurs later in the volume than her account of the feud between herself and Rewi Alley, Hyde describes her visit to Wuhan University, near Hankow, in which she converses with a Chinese professor of Chinese literature about Arthur Waley, whose translations the professor thinks are inadequate:

> [T]he black-gowned Professor, talking among the acacias, is depressed.  
> ‘I’m afraid the Japanese will soon be here and bomb all this.’  
> He doesn’t think there is any such thing as a really perfect translation of Chinese verses. Arthur Waley? He gets the *sense*, but what about the *rhythm*? Nobody ever gets the *rhythm*! (182)

By citing this professor’s criticism of Waley as one who doesn’t ‘get[…] the rhythm’, Hyde is burying within her text a matching criticism of Alley/Caley, whose alias sounds like ‘Waley’. We have seen already how the professor’s point-of-view on Waley’s writing is also Hyde’s position on the limitations which the stranger in China necessarily experiences, for example in her contention that for ‘every foreigner who tries to learn anything about China’, the learning must be done ‘piece-meal, by a way of pebble and dropped leaf and syllable’ (71). Hyde’s use of the Caley/Waley echo thus functions as an unvoiced criticism of Alley, a way of pointing out what he has missed in Chinese culture, which seems to be something close to an aesthetic, the features of Chinese culture that for Hyde embody reticence, delicacy and fragile beauty. In a 1938 letter to the Rawlinsons while she was still on board the *Changte*, Hyde remarked that
There is some vast difference in Chinese and foreigners. A Chinese is both momentary and timeless, like a flower or a tree, like anything left to its peace. A foreigner, especially a white foreigner, is like a clock. Wind the poor thing up and tick, tick, tick, as long as it lasts its devils make it go. (30 January 1938, cited in HBTS, 22)

Nowhere is this contrast more apparent in Dragon Rampant than in Hyde’s account of the tension apparent between her and Alley/Caley, who with his office walls ‘festooned with vivid woodcuts and linocuts, showing what awfulness can happen to Chinese workers if they don’t mind their eye with machinery’ (70) is oblivious to the many images and moments of serenity that move Hyde in China, and, as we saw in Chapter 4, even before she came to China:

He had a dwarf cherry blossom tree in his flat, and it had come into flower, some of the petals already lying like pale shells around its patient roots.

‘Fool thing!’ he said. ‘What’s the use of it, anyhow?’ (71)

Hyde’s eye is alive to the metaphorical and communicative potential of such images; Alley’s, it seems, is dead. Hyde’s exposure of this in Dragon Rampant is much too subtle to be called a lampooning, but it is one of the first revelations of hypocrisy in a man whose life was later revealed to have been extremely divided; Hyde’s suspicions of the authenticity of Alley’s cultural immersion are a subtle apprehension of the trajectory of what, according to present-day mores, we may call Alley’s criminality. Like Isherwood, whom he met and whose rehearsal of idealistic concerns he also punctured (to Isherwood’s contention that ‘One doesn’t know where to start’,
Alley replies, 'with a ferocious snort', "'I know where I should start [...]'. They were starting quite nicely in 1927" [253]), Alley had embraced the lifestyle available to homosexual westerners in Shanghai, 'even for a lowly fire officer of the International Settlement' (Brady, 25). Unlike Isherwood, his interest was not in beautiful young men (see note 6), but in boys, children. Thus Alley was by the time of Hyde's arrival well practised at living a paedophile's double life (indeed, the underworld attractions of Shanghai were, Brady suggests, one of the main things that drew Alley to China in the first place)\(^9\). Despite his commitment to improving Shanghai workers' industrial conditions, Alley would later become an apologist for Mao, one of those westerners who 'would allow themselves to be used for propaganda purposes. In return they were given a lifestyle that was superior to that of the majority of Chinese and, until the disillusion set in, the right to a belief in Utopia' (Brady, 37). Hyde's intuitive understanding, demonstrated in *Dragon Rampant*, of the extensive repressions and contradictions at work in Caley/Alley, has since proved utterly correct.\(^{11}\)

Alley's world was thus no place for a woman, and Hyde was quick to move on to the company of other foreign nationals. In her account of her time in Canton with Aysgarde and Paul, a New Zealand woman and her husband, we see the same concerns for the plight of women as victims that Hyde first voiced in her Gnostic poetry. Aysgarde's composure has been ruined by shell-shock, which is in turn debilitating the calm of her anxious husband Paul, and Hyde's depiction of the dynamics of distress at work in
their relationship forms a telling allegory for the condition of femininity itself.

Reserve, politeness and fear prevent all three of the friends from addressing their concerns over Aysgarde’s health:

Aysgarde was different: there was nothing you couldn’t understand about her, though at times she said and thought things far queerer, more fantastic, than Paul or I ever did. But that was because she was slightly shell-shocked, after the first five months’ heavy bombing in Canton, and for some reason which now seems quite idiotic, we were both pretending that she was not. She was dark and slim, and wore a white beret. (107-8)

In a description of a bizarre and bleakly humorous incident, in which Aysgarde berates a Chinese peasant for killing a slug, Hyde illuminates the vexed nature of several kinds of dualistic relationships: between the east and the west, between men and women, and between the ideologies of war and the practical reality for the people who experience them. Between all these opposed parties lies the dead oversized slug, defying understanding, resisting interpretation:

That was one moment. Then she was stumbling a little on the mud path, and crying, turning back, with her fists in her eyes, to talk at a kneeling man. He was a peasant, and his big, rather harsh face was momentarily open-mouthed with surprise, but quickly closed up again. He had a box of matches, several of which, burnt out, lay on the grass: he was finishing off the biggest slug I have ever seen. Aysgarde kept trying to tell him what she thought, out of a mouth shaking as her knees shook.

The peasant looked up at her, but then he looked at the slug again, and continued to finish it off with lighted matches out of his box. It wouldn’t have been so bad if the slug hadn’t bled red blood. But its big knot of flesh bled like a pig, there was quite a lot of red on the grass, it looked neither animal, vegetable, nor mineral, and so for a second the damned thing looked human, while Aysgarde kept sobbing: “If that’s what you’re like ... if that’s what you do ...”
Paul put her out of the way. He was perfectly white with rage, because he couldn’t bear a word of criticism about the Chinese, and didn’t see that Aysgarde wasn’t criticizing the Chinese, so much as criticizing the effects of five months’ heavy bombing on her own nervous system; and slugs; and a big mutt of a peasant—any nation’s peasant. (108-9)

Aysgarde’s misery continually impinges on the three friends’ travels together. Her attacks of depression and anxiety are both acute and debilitating, and punctuate Hyde’s account of their visits to bomb sites around Canton. At times, Aysgarde appears as a kind of emblem of suffering, both of the kind specific to women that Hyde identifies in The Book of Nadath, or as an interpretable, because western, image of the way in which war impacts of the lives of the young:

She had ten times the sparkle of the normal person, but it was just, somehow, that during the first months she had got caught. Now she went on, and you couldn’t help, and she knew it, and after the first half-dozen times you both knew it, so implacably that it was like watching somebody draw the dripping red razor very slowly across a throat half-cut. And she didn’t want to. You wanted to call out: ‘Stop doing that!’ but neither was that any use nor sense. If ever a girl wanted to struggle out of one body and into another! I didn’t understand that then, but now I do. (120)

The physical and mental difficulties under which Hyde wrote Dragon Rampant in London echo, in intensity if not in circumstance, those of Aysgarde. Hyde’s insight into the plight of this wrecked young woman is a difficult one, painfully sustained. It dismantles at least in part notions of western privilege in China, and makes clear, despite Hyde’s oblique manner in these passages, the way in which the war-damaged subject is threatened even
while her body remains intact. Or, as Hyde has Paul put it, ‘[…] I guess most women are permanently shellshocked’ (139). Thus, Hyde’s poem ‘Written at Hsuchowfu’, collected in *Houses by the Sea*, seems as much informed by the experience of Aysgarde as it is by the local women in the fallen town. In the last stanza, Hyde’s speaker declares that ‘That is a woman’s trick—to smile and to weep again’ (26); earlier in the poem she describes how

Keen and clean the air; sound of the cavalcade lingers,
Echoes and mocks and faints on the cloudy crests,
I would be beautiful, but not so beautiful,
Next time, let me be born with no breasts.  (13-16)

‘Little Horse, Field, Plough, Spade, Miss Flower-That-We-Eat, and Small Moon’: families and communities in *Dragon Rampant*.13

We have seen in the previous chapters of this thesis how much of Hyde’s writerly energy is spent on considering the particular concerns of women, both as subjects and as mothers. Women, mothers and children are of similar importance to *Dragon Rampant*, and Hyde spends a considerable amount of textual space in meditative examination of the experiences of the local women she meets in her travels. In the first part of her narrative, Hyde describes her German friend Anna ‘coming down the stairs, saying: “This is the day that makes me happier than my birthday. It is International Women’s Day”’ (83), and Hyde’s subsequent journey to the front can be read as an act of fidelity to Anna’s cherished idea of an international community of women. Hyde’s focus on maternity enables her to avoid many of the cultural traps that plague other writers, and which so entangle Aysgarde in her confrontation
with the peasant and his slug. Having found a point of mutual understanding through the experience of maternity, Hyde is then able to place the women she meets in a context which is both specific and universal. Describing her visit to the front near Hsuchowfu, Hyde makes the reader aware both of the wealth of human contact she experiences with the people she meets, and of the menace of the advancing forces. Though her textuality is preoccupied with anatomies of friendship and warm exchange, it is threatened by the unknown future that awaits. In this extract, the mothers and children of a village on the Pihsien Road provide a textual focus, their helplessness expressed literally by those among them with bound feet:

The mother of Little Horse was a nice woman, still quite young and slim, with a silver ear-ring in one ear, a soft voice and laugh. She adored her little girl. But she worked too hard: there on her finger was a Chinese thimble, much the same as ours, but topless.

“Aiyah!” she sighed, with the pretence-look of the good-looking woman not too old to bear a bit of flattery. “How can I be pretty, when I have to work so hard in the field?”

[...] The mother of Little Horse had bound feet; and though Little Horse had not, Miss Flower-That-We-Eat had dirty white bandages welling up to her ankles, so perhaps that was why she seemed such a slow, determined little girl. All the other children, both boys and girls, wore trampled coloured slippers, and looked clean and bright. (229)

Again, there is real empathy and interest here in Hyde’s narrative. She is not attempting to strike a narrative pose, so she is able to devote her writerly energy to presenting the scene with warmth and knowing liveliness. Her earlier description of the refugee camp in Shanghai gives the reader some hint of the fate that might await these families, but, as Hyde reveals, individual
continuance is even less certain at the front than in the refugee encampments of Shanghai.

The successful Japanese strike on the Pihsien Road produces not the grim knowledge of death but a different kind of horror: uncertainty. Hyde's earlier construction of herself as a polite domestic visitor to a group of local families provides her with a means of expressing, metonymically, the immense sense of fear and loss that comes with the localised attacks, and the pity of the disjunction between memory and reality. Thus, within a page of narrative, a scene which is both culturally specific and cheerfully domestic is blanked out, and Hyde's narrative concerning the women and their children may be rendered nothing but fiction, nothing but history:

The other children, once they felt sure that I wasn't going to bite them, started gently to feel my clothes and everything I had all over, and so did the women, who seemed particularly impressed by my big fur collar. But the children wouldn't let me touch them, the one exception being Miss Flower-That-We-Eat, who suffered herself to be picked up and joggled. (229)

The Japanese remnant, being bottled up in three villages, which for all their sun-coloured earth and willow trees looked like death, the windows and doors of them being cut-out holes of shadow, were busy entrenching too. It looked and sounded as if the Chinese had got them this time, all right; and maybe the Japanese in those three villages they did finish off, before the bigger, waiting trap snapped just too late, giving the Pihsien soldiers time to skip out of the road. But what didn't skip, what could hardly skip, remains a ghost ... the little village, the basket-maker's hut and the other huts: Little Horse, Field, Plough, Spade, Miss Flower-That-We-Eat, and Small Moon. (230)

The disappearance of these children from Hyde's narrative, so that they 'remain[...] a ghost' (230) is played out in almost every journey Hyde makes
near the sites of battle. Thus, of the people with whom she travelled by train to Hankow, Hyde later writes, ‘After about ten o’clock that morning, I never saw Mr. or Mrs. Koo again’ (158). Her reflections on this are typically understated, but once again provide a prose narrative which expresses the empathetic, insightful position we have seen Hyde formulate in her poems. Her theorising of separation in wartime feigns casualness through slang, a lightness of tone which, deliberately forced, shows the strain Hyde and her companions are all under:

Without noticing, I had worked over into the zone where not to see nice people again was the norm, especially if they were Chinese people. Normally, if you like people and they are good to you and you don’t hate them for that, you date them up, however casually. Here you didn’t, so the zone into which I had worked was the war zone. That finality is a part of war (particularly since war has got in among the civilians) which helps give it the gently smiling, gently staring gaze of a mental defective. (158)

Of a later journey to the front, subsequent to the one cited above, Hyde must be similarly offhand. The other options she has revealed through her narratives of her companions: to live a life of subsumed emotion like Caley/Alley, or break like Aysgarde. These narratives are among those which inform Hyde’s rejection of the faith of her missionary companion, Dr. Nettie. At this remove, Hyde suggests, it is inadequate and even futile to slate the failure of Christianity, since it is the mission hospitals which struggle to save the lives of the injured:

I wrote Paul Yuan a letter, thanking him for acting as my interpreter. About three days later […] we got some news from Yun Ho, though not from Paul.
It had been bombed almost to pieces. I don’t know whether they got Tang En-Po’s headquarters but I know what happened at the station. They got the dug-out, a direct hit, and one of the officials killed was the station-master who had given me his bed.

About Paul Yuan and Mr. Lung, about the friendly Chinese officer who had given me the trophies which wounded men and bombed women in Hsuchowfu found so encouraging, I don’t know. Dr. Nettie would say: “God knows,” but all I can say is that I don’t. I tried every way I could think of, but never heard of them again. It’s a big war in its way. (249)

‘He is a harvester, accepting summer’: reading Hyde, reading China.14

We have seen, then, in my analysis of the literary and cultural dynamics of *Dragon Rampant* not only the ways in which this text is unique and unlike other volumes written on the conflict in China at this time, but also the way in which its concerns are intertwined with the ideas exemplified in the poetics Hyde brought with her to China. In a foreign country among strangers, Hyde reveals the same imaginative curiosity and empathy, expressed in a deeply metaphoric manner, which makes her poetry so difficult and rewarding to read, and, as both Bertram and Hardy have noted, is characteristic of the experience of reading *Dragon Rampant*. We have also seen how the trajectories of empathy and optimism which sustain Hyde during her travels around China, including the experience of occupation at Hsuchowfu, are under immense pressure from the repeated experience of meeting, and losing, new people. Hyde’s well-tested cultural optimism is brought under more pressure in *Dragon Rampant* than anywhere else in her writing. What emerges from this pressure is something new and different, whose debt is
both to her immediate circumstances and the cultural stylings of her late poetics.

I have discussed in Chapter 4 the ways in which Hyde's later poetry begins to show evidence of those Buddhist and Taoist qualities of withdrawal and contemplation, in which the pursuit of happiness is no longer so much the immediate goal as the cessation of craving that brings suffering. In China, Hyde is exposed to Buddhist culture and religion directly, and is able to fashion new imaginative structures out of her experience. She does not try to appropriate an 'authentic' experience of Buddhism, instinctively understanding as she does throughout *Dragon Rampant* that such an appropriation is impossible, but instead reflects imaginatively on what she finds. Thus, when Hyde tours Shanghai with Alley, she describes how

> We came to a place where an entire though miniature village, clay-walled, black-tiled, had died twice over ... once swallowed whole by the Chinese factory areas, which had swept around it without disturbing it, and once killed for keeps, when the Japanese arrived. (93)

In the village temple, of which 'Caley said this must be a temple for the very poor, the sweepers and cleaners, or at least some of the gods would have been painted wood' (93), what remains Hyde finds she turns into writing twice; once in *Dragon Rampant*, and once in the poem 'The Deserted Village', which was considered by her contemporaries one of her best poems. In her prose volume, Hyde gives the bare facts of the discovery; in her poem, she extrapolates from it a cosmos emptied of compassion by the violence so recently to hand:
But village women had made Kwan-yin a neat trouser suit of beaded apricot satin and put beads and silver leaves in her hair. Before her lay toppled a tree about a foot high, sweetened up with bells and pink roses. I stood this on its feet again, and its child branches touched the childish suit of apricot satin. The temple was hung with scarlet cotton bags, containing the paper prayers of women who wish to bear children. There were also thin red wands and coils of incense. One of the red cotton prayer-bags I took away, thinking Kwan-yin and the woman who put it there would not have much use for it now. (DR, 93-4)

Finding in mangled wood one smiling childish tree, Roses and bells not one foot high, I set it back, at the feet of Kwan-Yin. A woman’s prayer-bag, Having within her paper prayers, paid for in copper, Seeing it torn, I gathered it up. I shall often think, ‘The woman I did not see Voiced here her dying wish. But the gods dreamed on. So low her voice, so loud The guns, all that death-night, who would stoop to hear?’

(‘The Deserted Village’, 22-31)

We see, in the starkness of Hyde’s translation from poetry to prose, her attempt to leave the experience as open to interpretation as possible; so much is contained in the narrative itself that Hyde’s customary furtherfiguring is not necessary. But within an earlier stanza of the poem, in which Hyde’s speaker declares, ‘Having broken the rice-bowl, seek not to fill it again’ (8), is the germ of a notion important to Hyde’s writing from China, and whose provenance is Buddhist: acceptance. This empty temple, whose ‘last vain prayer bled up / When the women ran outside to be slain’ (10-11), is not the place where Hyde develops her metaphoric structures, but it heralds them nonetheless. In the figure of Kwan-yin Hyde finds much to reflect on; she becomes, in Dragon Rampant, another symbol of the kind of embattled
courage and graceful kindness that Hyde's Gnostic subjects and Waleian speakers strive to demonstrate. Though Hyde claims that 'I have small use for the female principle segregated from life' (76), Kwan-yin remains for her the site of something positive, nonetheless:

Chinese Kwan-yin and Japanese Kwannon, the two eastern Mercies, are not the same: yet look at their mouths, and you will notice one haunting resemblance. Both these women smile: it is a smile tender, everlasting, and wise. Then think how few of the immortal women of history or mythology are given to smiling. The Mona Lisa ... call hers a smile? Yet the blood rains thick as locusts between Kwan-yin and Kwannon. (76)

The poise of Kwan-yin is not easily translated into the experiences the embattled local people tell Hyde of in her visits to their villages. Yet the state of being that Hyde describes, in a letter to the Rawlinsons, as 'both momentary and timeless' (HBTS 22), and which Kwan-yin to some extent embodies, is also visible for Hyde in the people she meets. This is no orientalist reductivism, but rather an attempt to understand by metaphor and imaginative allusion, the interiority of a collective consciousness. 'What the Chinese apparently likes,' quips Hyde, 'is to live, to have a reasonably good time, if possible. He is a harvester, accepting summer' (137). The words and images which Hyde took to herself in the formation of her Waleian poetic are here replaced by something else, whose difference is indicated by the difference implicit between 'summer' and 'autumn':

There are many beautiful poems written by old poets, expressing the autumnal mood, but the richness of these is the richness of bodily eyes spending the last of their sight on a meridian passed from them; hands grown thin as shells, stretched lovingly out to draw upon the last lakes of sunlight. (137)
Like the handwritten prayers whose writers are now dead, described in ‘The Deserted Village’, the ‘autumnal mood’ of the ‘old poets’ must necessarily give way to something else in this time of massive change and uncertainty, not least because of the immense practical difference between the circumstances of the ancient civil servants and their war-ravaged modern heirs. Hyde recognises in the war the Chinese people are experiencing a new kind of brutal modernity, which demands that the old ideas be re-expressed; never abandoned, only configured for an historical moment unlike any other. How this works and what this means is expressed in a dialogue called ‘Harvest Bird’, in the section of Dragon Rampant following the occupation of Hsuchowfu. Linda Hardy has suggested that the ‘Harvest Bird’ dialogue occurs ‘between a pregnant woman and a wheat field’ (xviii), but identity in the text is less fixed than this; the speakers are both woman and wheat, mother and grain. Obliquely, allusively and by degrees, the speakers assemble a picture of a metaphoric response to the destruction of Hsuchowfu and, on a larger scale, the war itself:

Listen, they’ve begun. It’s a sweet noise, I like it, the noise of the big scythes in the centre of the field, working nearer. I suppose that is how the bees’ murmuring sounds to the flower. The men are working hard. Yesterday the noise was away at the far end of the field, but now, if everything goes well, they may reach this corner before nightfall.

Then we’ll be cut down.

As if that mattered! After that our children will be born, our sons and daughters, the grain.

I shall only have a daughter, ignorant and ugly, but you will certainly have a fine son.

You are laughing at me. But taken all together, I certainly
think we give them a good field. To-morrow, perhaps you and I will be threshed out, and lie with our heads together under the stone, while the donkey marches round and round in darkness. (267)

It is, it seems, as Po Chü-i advises his reader in ‘Resignation’: ‘Better by day to sit like a sack in your chair; / Better by night to lie like a stone in your bed’ (5-6). The dialogue of the speakers in ‘Harvest Bird’ takes the place of the empty, exhaustive rhetoric which Hyde rejects throughout *Dragon Rampant*.

There is always, the text suggests, ‘another thing’:

> It’s all we need know, but there is another thing. Often we used to hear the trains on the railway track. They run to another place down in south fields, not a wheat country but a country for rice and millet, and there the people who come out to the railway trains sell little patties, made in the dirt. On one side a character says ‘Ground,’ and on the other, another character says ‘Sky.’ That is what we do not know, but there is some meaning in it, ground and sky. It’s what we are all made of, men and wheat. (268)

The dialogue concludes with a call for a return to a pre-textual, pre-linguistic consciousness, which reads both as a sign that Hyde has interpolated into Chinese culture and as a message of consolation to her writing self and to western culture. Just as the Chinese people are accepting the coming of the harvest bird, so the west must shortly do the same. The harvest bird is the harbinger of war, death, collective suffering and acceptance of these things, all together. The retraction of the wheat-language is like an abandonment of ineffectual anxiety in the face of harvest, which, as Hyde has already articulated, is in itself a moral victory:

> Let us be tired, let us forget to pretend that we have voices
or thoughts, and sink into our own speech, the slow rustling murmur of many laden heads, meeting the keener voice of the scythes. Can’t you hear the harvest bird calling, early this year? He never forgets to come to China. Some of our people say he sings: ‘Work now, work now,’ but others say it is ‘Worship now.’ I will be wise for once, I will tell you what you are going to say. You are going to say ‘There is no difference, Ground is written on one side and Sky on the other.’ (270)

This international message is also specific to fallen Hsuchowfu, whose fate Hyde remains largely silent on, and whose horrors are largely extra-textual. Here, Hyde explains, ‘accept[ing] [...] summer and harvest[ing] the[...] harvest’ becomes a redemptive moral condition which, she implies, connects to eventual material continuance:

[Hsuchowfu] was a city of 200,000 people, and it died in visible ways, in spirit as well as in material things. But it will surely live again, as a Chinese city, because its people accepted their summer and harvested their harvest, though it came with blood. (194)

The last part of Dragon Rampant describes Hyde’s difficult journey out of Hsuchowfu, during which she is captured, stripped and beaten by Japanese soldiers. But though her narrative continues, the zenith of the many original metaphorical structures which inform Dragon Rampant is expressed in the ‘Harvest Bird’ dialogue. Hyde came to China with an intricate, complex poetic, an investigative curiosity and an open mind. Her narrative has her leaving in the state of acceptance she sees as essential to the survival of the Chinese people and their culture, an acceptance she has learnt from the people themselves. In the last paragraphs of Dragon Rampant, Hyde makes some of the most explicitly political statements of the volume,
then retracts them, as the wheat-language is retracted. The troubles and ill-health that followed Robin Hyde from China to England would eventually prove fatal, but her text here, as everywhere, preaches resistance to blame and attribution, calling instead for acceptance, restraint, 'an effort toward understanding' (13):

‘Long before the Sino-Japanese conflicts and recent events leading up to them began, I think that the western world, coming to the eastern world, was also tragically and hideously wrong. How can I say the greatness of that wrong? [...]’
[....]
But no. To say or write this would only have been ridiculous.
(317)

And not for passing guests are set in motion
Junks that are autumn leaves across the ocean.
(‘Hong Kong Water’, HBTS, 9-10)

An earlier version of this chapter was published, under the same title, in *JNZL* 16, pp.45-57.

*Dragon Rampant*, p.13.

I have used in this chapter the older Wade-Giles system of spelling Chinese words, rather than the more modern *Pinyin* Chinese phonetic alphabet, so that my own spellings match those of Hyde and her contemporaries.

The line quoted in square brackets here is in Hyde’s typescript of this poem, part of the Challis Collection, but does not appear in *Houses by the Sea*. I have included it here since it fits the metre and rhyme scheme of the poem, although it does not figure in my subsequent line reference.

*Dragon Rampant*, p.172.

In his 1976 memoir *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood describes how

Towards the end of their visit [to Shanghai], Wystan [Auden] and Christopher began taking afternoon holidays from their social conscience in a bath-house where you were erotically soaped and massaged by young men. You could pick your attendants, and many of them were beautiful [...] What made the experience pleasingly exotic was that tea was served to the customer throughout; even in the midst of an embrace, the attendant would disengage one hand, pour a cupful and raise it, tenderly but firmly, to the customer’s lips. (229)

The intent of this paragraph is humorous as well as confessional, yet it is only when Isherwood begins to write his homosexuality back into his earlier cultural reportage that his narrative loses its sense of inappropriate lightheartedness, which a later politics of reading reveals as camp rather than ignorant.

One section of Bertram’s opening chapter in *Unconquered* (‘Approach of War’) is titled ‘Alarum Off’, which expresses the impending deadly conflict as though it were a Shakespeare play. In ‘Collapse in the North’ he calls Peiping ‘that Florence of the East’ (34) and goes on to assert that the city ‘had been too long a palace of Sans Souci’ (34). These comparisons at once trivialise and elevate the conflict Bertram encounters, making it seem lightweight and worthy of consideration only because of its resemblance to the *divertimenti* of England and western Europe.

*Dragon Rampant*, p.182.

See Brady, pp.23-5.

Brady notes in her thesis that ‘Alley’s nephew David Somerset described his uncle as “a paedo philie who [in the 1940s] was the envy of other members of the gay community [in China]” (38). Alley was at this time the director of the *Shandan* Industrial School for Boys, located in the Gobi Desert. The school’s age of admission was reduced from fourteen to twelve years at Alley’s instigation; Brady also notes that Alley and other teachers, both Chinese and foreign, had homosexual affairs with the students (38).

See the section ‘The House of Woman’ (8-14), in which Nadath’s efforts to build the eponymous house are sabotaged not only by men, but by women themselves.

*Dragon Rampant*, p.230.
14 *Dragon Rampant*, p. 137.

15 Usually spelt Kuan-yin (Wade-Giles) or Guanyin (*Pinyin*). Hyde uses her preferred spelling, 'Kwan-yin', throughout her career.
Conclusion: ‘Can’t you hear the harvest bird calling [...]?’¹

Then I went away, and everything stayed quietly dark and silver. (Dragon Rampant, 19)

Although this thesis is about poetics, it has ended with prose. More than one commentator has suggested that Hyde’s experiences in China gave her, finally, the real-life material substantial enough to relieve her poetics of some of its overwrought quality. We have seen how in poems such as ‘The Deserted Village’ Hyde adopts a form simpler, and indeed much closer to prose, than we find in much of her earlier work. Nonetheless, it is disingenuous and indeed unhelpful to view Hyde as a poet in search of a subject, as I hope this thesis proves. The several crises which impinged on her experience prior to 1930 meant that from an early stage in her career she was experienced in writing about difficulty, and even terror, and we have seen how the open-ended, formally relaxed stylings of her Waleian poetic have their antecedents in the conceptual focus of her writings that epitomise the subject’s search for gnosis, a search Hyde sees as pan-cultural, though gendered.

In Hyde’s writings from China, we find a combination, rather than a culmination, of her earlier concerns, and rather than understanding the form and subject matter of her China writing as the late fulfilment of early promise, we should see in it another example of Hyde’s reliable poetical intuition and ability to adapt her existing methods of writing to the demands of a new setting, just as her Malorian poetics gives way to the influence of Waley as her
concerns move from constructing a private anatomy of transgressive desire to incorporating the experience of that desire into the bush and beach settings Hyde lived in after 1937. What does distinguish Hyde’s China writings as among her very best, as I have argued, is her obliteration, in Dragon Rampant, of the narratorial ‘I’, for the purpose of diminishing the risk of the harmful and reductive generalising that her contemporaries practise. We have seen how Hyde’s astute sense of the international political scene is ever tempered by her awareness that it is at the level of the community, families and individuals, that political narratives are truly made. Dragon Rampant, and the poems that accompany it, are thus remarkable examples of an empathetic praxis which posits a kind of inter-cultural intimacy as the thing that will ensure the survival of the world’s cultures; not only the dignity of the individual, but the individual in his or her own cultural environment. We must, Hyde seems to say, allow every subject to make a Home in This World.

This thesis has followed a loosely-chronological trajectory, in which, having established in detail the manner and matter of the critical tradition of which this thesis is a part, my consideration of Hyde’s heretical refiguring of Christian narratives, together with an analysis of the trace of the Gnostic in her earlier poetry, proceeds to a reading of the ways in which Malory provides for Hyde a structure of desire by which she can transform some of the most personal narratives of her life into deeply figured writing whose emotional scale, if not its length, is epic. Like many projects of extreme intensity, this poetic gives way, sometime during and after Hyde’s departure
from the Lodge at Avondale, to a poetics in which Waley's translations of the Chinese poets provide a contemplative model for describing the subject, in nature, in history, and sometimes in difficulty. Throughout all these poetical stylings runs a deep vein of compassion, which is as constant in Hyde's verse as her search for innovative vocabularies and unusual grammatical figurings. It is this that finds its fullest flowering in Hyde's China writings: it is the quality that rises from the subtext to the text itself when the conditioning power of the 'I' is reduced.

However, although there is a chronological element at work in the ordering of my discussion, it should not be interpreted as the principal part of my argument. Between the variant poetics discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are periods of considerable overlap, and my division of Hyde's poetics into three principal periods prior to her departure for China should not be construed as rigid by any standard. Rather, it has been my aim to demonstrate the considerable depth and complexity of Hyde's poetic concerns, and to construct her as a writer whose work repays the same intensive study as is assumed necessary for those writers whom she drew on for her own work: not only the biblical and Gnostic narratives, Malory and Waley, but Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, the Romantics, Tennyson, and all those modern writers and poets of Hyde's own time who contributed to what Rawlinson has called the 'huge anthology of world poetry' that Hyde 'carried in her head' (HBTS, 19). Hyde's poetry demands repeated reading and extended consideration, not the summary and dismissal that it received in the decades
after her death. It is, as Michele Leggott has demonstrated in her critical and creative writing, a body of work which the reader can take to heart, and by which the reader's sensibility and imaginative vocabulary can be changed. Although this thesis stems, as I discussed in the introduction, from my initial interest in gender and settler subjectivity in New Zealand writing, it is equally possible, and important, to read Hyde as the international subject, writer and cultural commentator, that she constructs herself as in her poetry. Her poetry is serious-minded and resistant to faddish stylistics, as we see in her unease about the poets she called Modern, and it is my hope that my analysis of it in this thesis has done enough to set aside any remaining concerns about Hyde's use of register; we have seen how Hyde, a cultural ventriloquist, is comfortable addressing her culture's many discourses in their own vocabulary, whether the archaisms of the Authorised Version or the serene, irregularly-rhymed lines of her later poems where the influence of Waley's Chinese poets is evident.

Any reading of Hyde's writing must be an under-reading, since the numerousness of her interests and the volume of her manuscripts exceeds the temporal and spatial restrictions of a single research project. I would be alarmed, therefore, if my thesis were interpreted as making any claims to be an exhaustive account of Hyde's poetics; indeed, I envision it as the most junior of beginnings, a demonstration of the kind of work that can be done reading Hyde, and a pointer, I hope, to the many directions Robin Hyde research may yet take. The diversity, complexity and sheer inarguable volume of Hyde's work mean that it is robust enough to stand up to any critical model, and my
focus on text, context and subtext should only be interpreted as political in the sense that such textual work exclusively concerned with Hyde has not been done to this length since Sandbrook’s 1985 account of Robin Hyde’s notebooks and manuscripts. We have seen how at times Hyde’s writing relies on a conception of language as substantial and loaded with authority, as in her interrogation of traditional Christian narratives in her poetry, or in her adoption of what might be called an Anzac register in *Passport to Hell*, a gesture which was controversial in its own time, and how at other times she takes advantage of what we might now understand as the limits and unreliability of language to interrogate the authority of narrative itself, as in the metaphorical transformations of the landscape in ‘White Irises’, or the chapters in *Dragon Rampant* where the struggle of language to account for horror is made apparent at a textual level. The task of theoretical criticism in dealing with Hyde’s writing will not be to find relevant examples, but to continue to systematise, as I have tried to do in this thesis, Hyde’s ability to write in any matter on any thing.

It is also my hope that, for those critics and students who may read this thesis, my model of analysis, which might best be described as a combination of close reading and associative linking, will provide an example of the way in which other concerns might be drawn out of Hyde’s writing, particularly her poetry. Although I have focused on Malory and Waley in my analysis of the way in which Hyde formulates other writers’ narrative concerns to fit her own, there are many other literary figures whose influence
remains to be extrapolated from Hyde’s texts. Michele Leggott has considered briefly the importance of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, as well as Sappho and indeed Hyde’s contemporary Eileen Duggan. In addition to these writers, I nominate the transgressive heroines of Shakespeare’s comedies, the strange politics of Shelley, the emotional and indeed sexual subtexts of Tennyson’s poems, and the narcissistic dream-worlds of Yeats’s early poetry as worthy of consideration in relation to the internal dynamics of Hyde’s writing.

Much more remains to be said about the political dynamics of Hyde’s writing from China, and it is with regret that I have only had space to consider in outline the relationship between the New Zealand-written poems of Hyde’s Waleian poetic and the poems produced in China and England. Similarly, I have only touched on the way in which Hyde’s work demonstrates what might be understood as a kind of modified humanism: an inter-cultural project of compassionate understanding that relies on empathy and restraint as the two touchstones that may yet reconcile political and cultural antagonists. Such imaginative structures as those that determine *Dragon Rampant* are open to interpretation, I contend, as providing a sustainable interpretative model that demonstrates some viable fidelity towards western cultural history without the devastating impact of the subjectivity that understands the Other only in terms of the Self, yet which avoids the relativism and indeed nihilism that are a problem for some analytical projects which seek to embody the compromised cultural moralities of the postmodern. Hyde hoped that *Dragon*
Rampant might be understood as ‘an effort towards’ the understanding that would produce not ‘mystical faith, but [...] faith of man in man’ (13) in order to ease the deadly, combative pressure between nation and nation, or culture and culture. It is my hope that my small reading of Hyde’s poetics might contribute to the continuing opening-up of our critical understanding of Hyde writing, so that the visionary narrative of such altruistic aims may continue to be better known by the reading community.
1 Dragon Rampant, p.270.

2 See A Home in this World, p.12: ‘Poetry is the rainbow as well as the engine-room’.

3 See Smith’s introduction to the 1986 reprint of this volume, or Ash’s discussion of the novel (together with Nor the Years Condemn and The Godwits Fly) in her 1990 thesis, pp.91-9.

4 In addition to the ‘Harvest Bird’ dialogue, Hyde also includes in Dragon Rampant a question-and-answer chapter called ‘Interview with a Ghost’ (pp.250-66) which parodies journalism’s inability to account for experience, in such passages as

Q. Did you ever do anything like work?
A. Very little. Learned to vaccinate Chinese kids, but the supply, unfortunately, gave out. Helped to dress the wounds of some soldiers; they got bayoneted by the Japanese next day. Saw bomb-cases; I was slow, though, having no training and no Mandarin. Wrote articles until and after the postal system collapsed. [...] (260)

Appendix I: poems by Robin Hyde cited in this thesis.

*The Desolate Star* (1929)

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Appendix II: translations by Arthur Waley cited in this thesis.

**One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems (1918)**

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