

Hellfire and Queer Nation in Godzone

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God of Nations at Thy feet
In the bonds of love we meet¹

THOMAS BRACKEN'S COUPLET was first published in 1878 and established in 1939 as the opening lines of the New Zealand national anthem, *God Defend New Zealand*. Like many classic colonialist texts, the New Zealand national anthem is constituted by means of discourses of nationalism, sexuality, and Christianity, discourses which have become the stuff of much late-twentieth-century postcolonial scholarship. As in other former colonies of the British Empire, there is in Aotearoa New Zealand a burgeoning interest in postcolonial studies which, in some instances, intersects with lesbian, gay and/or queer studies.² While the term queer has been associated with a range of sexual identities and sexual practices,³ queer theory in the latter part of the twentieth century has been associated with the potential of a critical pluralism to undermine the discursive privilege accorded to a Western subjectivity.

Close scrutiny of the discursive practices of British textual imperialism—which also manifest as processes and effects of assimilation and exclusion in the realms of the production, dissemination, critical reception, and recuperation of literatures in postcolonial (con)texts—is one of the roles of the postcolonial critic. I begin, therefore, from Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson's premise that colonialism "is an operation of discourse [which] interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation" (3). In the course of my essay, the

term “postcolonial” is intended to offset the imperialist signifying practice whereby colonial subjects are implicitly colonialist subjectivities.

For the purpose of my argument—that reading postcolonial (con)texts requires attention to the signifying imperatives of colonialist discourse—I offer, in Part One of this essay, a reading of two short colonialist texts from *The Empire Annual for Girls*. These readings are oriented towards understanding them as what Elleke Boehmer argues are texts “informed by theories concerning the superiority of European culture and the rightness of Empire” (3). I approach these colonialist texts through a semiological reading strategy offered by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*. This reading strategy provides the means whereby the text can be made to express the dominant values of a given historical period (Silverman 41; Barthes, *Semiotic Challenge* 5).

My reading of Mrs. Creighton’s “To Girls Of The Empire: Words of Encouragement and Stimulus to the Daughters of the Nation” (Buckland 39-44) illustrates what Barthes refers to as the signifying imperatives of the classic text (*S/Z* 4). My reading of Eileen O’Connell’s “Such a Treasure!: How a New Zealand Girl Found her True Calling” (Buckland 120-30) supports the Barthesian thesis that a text always signifies beyond itself. In so far as texts exceed the classic model, a reader’s involvement can convert the classic text into the writerly text (Barthes, *S/Z* 5).⁴ While the classic text can be made to reveal a “limited plural,” Barthes argues that a considerable distance separates the rewritten classic text from the writerly text, which, however, “is not a thing” (*S/Z* 5). As Kaja Silverman argues, the writerly text

comes into existence as an archaeological dig at the site of the classic text. It exhumes the cultural voices, or codes, responsible for that latter’s enunciation, and in the process it discovers multiplicity instead of consistency, and signifying flux instead of stable meaning. (246)

In Part Two of this essay, I pursue aspects of Barthes’s concept of the writerly text through excerpts from two postcolonial lesbian novels, *Does This Make Sense To You?* and *Daisy and Lily: A Novel*, by New Zealand author Renée.⁵

I. Reading Classic Colonialist Texts

For Barthes, textuality is a process carried out simultaneously at five different levels or codes. Barthes identifies these codes and their functions: the hermeneutic code articulates and resolves enigmas; the proairetic code establishes fixed sequences of actions; the semic code functions to define persons and places; the symbolic code establishes unresolvable oppositions; and the cultural codes, which are numerous and heterogeneous, largely subsume all other codes (Silverman 241). Taken separately each code can be seen to serve the classic text in particular ways.⁶ Together, and in infinite combinations, codes reveal themselves through the denotative and connotative potential of the signifiers. Silverman argues that the classic text “tends to establish the denotative signified as a privileged and authoritative term” (240). While the denotative signified varies between texts, in a classical Western episteme of representation, it signifies the ultimate privilege accorded to the paternal signifier. Because connotation “introduces into texts what might be called a ‘cultural unconscious,’ [it] provides one of the chief vehicles for ideological meaning” (108). Barthes approaches this “surreptitious” signifying activity of connotation (or connotation in its repressive form), via the codes (or levels of connotation), which function to repeat and reproduce the existing cultural order (239). Connotation is, according to Barthes, also “a correlation immanent in the text” (*S/Z* 8).⁷

Barthes’s strategy involves segmentation of the text into blocks of signification, *lexias*, or units of reading (*S/Z* 13).⁸ Segmentation fragments the structure of the text and separates one signifier from another. In this way, texts can be entered at any point and their structure made intelligible. These textual interruptions, which isolate signifying units from each other, impede linear narrative progress. This decentering of the text gives way to the practice of “the infinitely different Text” (7).

In my reading of a segment of Mrs. Creighton’s “To Girls Of The Empire,” I pay brief attention to the operations of the proairetic code, the semic code, the symbolic code, and the connotative function of proverbial statements as they reproduce the values and objectives of Western Enlightenment humanism

in the constitution of a classic colonialist text. I also draw attention to the connotative potential of contradictory meanings in this text.⁹

At this moment there seems to come a special call to women to share in the work that we believe The British Empire is bidden to do for the good of the whole world. . . . Girls naturally look forward into life and wonder what it will bring them. . . . they should all from the first realise the bigness of their position, and see themselves as citizens of a great country, with a great work to do for God in the world. . . . We are seeing increasingly in every department of life how much depends upon the home and upon the training given by the mother, and yet it does not seem as if girls as a rule prepared themselves seriously for that high position. The mother should be the first, the chief religious teacher of her children. . . . Women who follow their husbands into the distant parts of the earth, and are called to be home-makers in new lands, may find themselves not only compelled to stand alone, but called upon to help maintain the religious life in others. . . . To some may come the call to realise what it means to recognise our brotherhood with peoples of other races and other beliefs. Even within our own Empire there are . . . countless multitudes waiting for the truth of the gospel to bring light and hope into their lives. . . . [M]ake yourselves ready to hear whatever call may come. There is some service wanted from you; to give that service will be your greatest blessing, your deepest joy. . . . It must be done, not for your own gratification, but because you are the followers of One who came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. (39-44)

According to Barthes, the classic text “always gives this impression: the author first conceives the signified (or the generality) and then finds for it, according to the chance of his imagination, good signifiers, probative examples” (*S/Z* 173). Good signifiers of a God-fearing British Empire are to be found in (at least) the following nouns, and adjectival and verbal phrases: “chief religious teacher,” “followers,” “the brotherhood,” “husbands,” “citizens,” “mother,” “girls,” “home-makers,” “other races,” “countless multitudes,” “the good,” “the bigness,” “the training,” “a great work,” “religious life,” “the gospel,” “the truth,” “light,” “hope,” “service,” “gratification.” Probative examples, of a God-fearing British Empire, are to be found in (at least) “the home,” “a great country,” “our own empire,” “the whole world.” A collective and personal good is signified, for example, by correlative “blessings” and “joys.”¹⁰

Silverman points out that good signifiers represent a particularly powerful syntagmatic lure (245). In Mrs. Creighton's text the proairetic code serves the classic linear narrative in the particular sequencing of events and ideas. Where the British Empire, for example, "is bidden," and "girls naturally look forward," the proairetic code makes certain that clusters of events will follow each other in a predictable order. Further evidence of the operation of the proairetic code, on which the symbolic code depends for its momentum, lies in the following verbal phrases: "a special call," "to share," "we believe," "it will bring," "should all," "work to do," "see themselves," "realise," "how much depends upon," "the first," "should be," "are called," "find themselves compelled," "help maintain," "waiting for," "wanted from," "make yourselves." In this way, the proairetic code determines narrative and syntactic progression. Moreover, since meaning emerges only through the temporal or diachronic unfolding of a signifying chain, and since meaning does not pre-exist the syntagmatic alignment of signifiers, the signified *is* that syntagmatic alignment (Silverman 163). Such actions, Barthes argues, form the main armature of the readerly text (*S/Z* 19).

The semic code, defining persons and places, serves this classic text by means of (at least) two true and literal signifieds: "God" and "The British Empire," which together constitute the entire denotative sign: a God-fearing British Empire. Good signifiers and probative examples of a God-fearing British Empire are also textual manifestations of the symbolic code.¹¹ The subjectivity of the colonialist girl is constituted through the signifiers of national, domestic, and Christian service. Her future of duty and service is signified through her mother's training and example, and the mother's position as follower of God, of her husband, and as universal home-maker affords them citizenship, albeit in the brotherhood of nations.

A particular narrative sequence exists when, and because, it can be given a name. The narrative sequence unfolds as this process of naming takes place (Barthes, *S/Z* 19). What is signified/named—under generic titles for actions such as, training, recognition, and following—and sequenced in this classic text, is the colonialist women's servitude to God, empire, nation,

home, family, and to the countless multitudes. The British Empire is thus paradigmatically and syntagmatically reproduced.

Barthes refers to the connotative functions of proverbial statements within the structure of the classic text as one of the most conspicuous symptoms of cultural coding. Paradoxically, the authority, or voice, behind connotation is anonymous which serves to conceal how meaning is produced.¹² In "To Girls Of The Empire," Mrs. Creighton is the manifest narrator. Proverbial truths such as "Girls naturally look forward into life," are, however, delivered authoritatively through the voice (once-removed) of "the One who came."

A further aspect of Barthes's semiological strategy for reading classic texts is an emphasis upon the contradictory meanings of each textual element. When Mrs. Creighton asks her readers to "to realise what it means to recognise our brotherhood with peoples of other races and other beliefs," the realization of the recognition of the obligations and duties of brotherhood implies a relationship of fraternal equality. There is, however, an implicit contradiction in the following and qualifying sentence where the countless multitudes wait for the truth of the gospel to bring light and hope into their lives. What is presented, on the one hand, as a fraternal relationship is, on the other hand, implicitly restated as a paternalist relationship.

In "To Girls Of The Empire," the classic text of British imperialism is concealed in a narrative of Christian families home-making in a great country. The (re)constitution of a colonialist subjectivity in a home-away-from-home is predicated on the privilege of the paternal signifier. The British Empire (that is, God, nation, man, *pater familias*) is connotatively signified as benefactor of all. The British Empire can thus be read as a metaphor of the colonialist (re)constitution of the symbolic order through God's house in the colonies. In this classic colonialist text, God's house is "the hearth" of denotation.¹³

A semiological approach to such classic texts is illustrative of the semiological principle that the terms "subject and signification are at all points interdependent" (Silverman 194). The truth of the existing cultural and symbolic order is "the gospel" that women (as well as the countless multitudes), will agree to be

spoken through this classic colonialist narrative and will extend the chain of imperialist and godly authority to their own daughters. Thus constituted, the colonialist subject will accede to the terms of the unfolding narrative of service to the One, manifest for those “who follow their husbands into the distant parts of the earth . . . [and] are called to be home-makers in new lands.” The colonialist girl, is both produced and situated, processed and placed, in this classic narrative, which reveals that the British Empire is not the first meaning, [or Signified] but pretends to be so; [and] under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the last of the connotations—the one which seems both to establish and to close the reading (Barthes, *S/Z* 9).

My reading of this classic colonialist text supports the Barthesian thesis that the classic text is always constituted by a limited plural, or polysemy (*S/Z* 6). My reading of grouped segments from a second classic colonialist text O’Connell’s “Such a Treasure!: How a New Zealand Girl Found her True Calling” further illustrates the writerly potential of the classic text through an analysis of the operation of the hermeneutic code in the articulation of an enigma. My reading also explores how the signifying operations of metaphor create an enigmatic dialectic of absence and presence in this text. It is through the connotative potential of the metaphor treasure that this text is made to express the dominant values of this historical period.

“Evelyne, come to my room before you go to your singing lesson. I have had a most important letter from your father; the New Zealand mail came in this morning. . . .”

A few minutes later the door opened, and she turned to the young girl, who with a song on her lips danced merrily into the room. At the sight of Mrs Trevor’s face she stopped suddenly, exclaiming, “Something is wrong! What has happened?”

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

“To New Zealand?—I refuse to go.”

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

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

“Don’t betray such absurd ignorance, Eva. . . . you must know that New Zealand is a British colony, inhabited mainly by our own people, who are as well educated and as well mannered as ourselves. . . .”

Six weeks later, Eva landed at Wellington [where] she was a treasure to her father . . . hav[ing] learned now to see [herself] with other eyes than [her] own. (120-30)

In the classic text, the hermeneutic code is entrusted with the responsibility of formulating, articulating, and resolving enigmas. Silverman argues that because the hermeneutic code moves toward disclosure, like the semic code, it projects a stable subject about whom things can ultimately be discovered although the process may be painstaking and full of delays—a subject, in short, who can be defined and known (262). It finds expression through half-sentences, questions, and silence as well as through narrative delay or equivocation (250-51).

In “Such a Treasure!” the enigma is signified by “the sight of Mrs Trevor’s face,” at which Eva exclaims: “Something is wrong! What has happened?” Mrs Trevor agrees: “You are right, Eva, something has happened—something, my child, that will affect your whole life.” Things are, enigmatically, both right and wrong. Eva responds to this contradiction: “I refuse to go.” Eva’s resistance to, and refusal of, the symbolic and cultural orders, intervene only briefly, in the ideological consistency in this text. Because the hermeneutic code “operates in tandem with the semic code to inscribe and re-inscribe a culturally determined position” (Silverman 262), further possible intervention is sealed off via Mrs Trevor’s statement: “You have no choice in the matter, dearest.”

The classic text recovers itself in a return to the specificity of the signified: “Six weeks later, Eva landed at Wellington,” where Eva accedes to patriarchal nomination as “a treasure to her father.” In acceding to her status as a domestic treasure, Eva successfully assimilates “the authority inherent in the symbolic order where she finds herself ‘at home’ in those discourses and institutions which define [it]” (Silverman 141). Where textual imperialism is predicated on learning to see with eyes other than one’s own, the colonialist girl will also “recognize [her]self within the mirror of the reigning ideology, even if h[er] race and economic status place h[er] in contradiction to it” (Silverman 141).

Barthes identifies connotation, in its repressive form, as an agency of ideology. Barthes also draws attention to the writerly

“surreptitious” signifying activity of connotation (Silverman 240). It is this surreptitious signifying activity of connotation which reveals the writerly potential in this text. Barthes points out that metaphor exploits relationships of conceptual similarity (Silverman 110). In such relationships “the more privileged of the terms remains hidden; it falls to the position of the signified, while the other functions as its signifier or representative within the text” (Lloyd 112). Since connotation is the means whereby the privileged and authoritative term is contested and a signifying diversity is promoted (Silverman 240), by turning away from the denotative signified—Eva’s father’s house (read: the British Empire)—to the connotative potential of the metaphor “treasure” the ideological inconsistency within this text can be revealed. As “a minimal narrative of identity” (Lloyd 72), the metaphor “treasure,” involves the two elements: profit and loss. What is assimilated and falls to the position of the signified is profit. What functions as its signifier and is left over as residue, subordinated in the wider text, is loss. As her father’s domestic treasure and as an imperial asset, the colonialist girl is accorded commodity status within a capitalist-imperialist economy of profit and exploitation/loss. She is also, therefore, subject to imperialist nomination as an imperialist treasure, signifying metaphorical equivalence to the (indigenous) colonized.¹⁴

It is, therefore, consistent with the symbolic order of the British Empire that the colonialist girl is both profiteer and loser, colonizer and colonized. This point is made by Anne McClintock when she argues that “gender is a signifier which covers over race privilege.”¹⁵ Tiffin and Lawson also argue that the female colonialist subject is “a site upon which contending, but also mutually affirming, systems of domination meet: the female settler is simultaneously an object of patriarchy and an agent of imperial[ist] racism” (231).

My reading of these two classic colonialist texts shows that despite all efforts to signify in accordance with the requirements of the classic text, “there can be no transcendental signified, only provisional [signifieds] which function in turn as signifiers” (Silverman 246). While my reading by no means exhausts either the signifying diversity or connotative potential of these classic

colonialist texts, it does suggest that "it is when the children of the colonies read such texts and internalize their own subjection that the true work of colonial[ist] textuality is done" (Tiffin and Lawson 4).¹⁶ As Stephen Slemon argues in "The Scramble for Post-Colonialism," these classic texts written some eighty-six years ago can in this way be read as "provid[ing] the means whereby the 'information' contained in the authoritative texts of a given symbolic order finds its way into the [cultural products] which perpetuate that order" (17).

II. Reading The Writerly Text In Two Novels By Renée

I turn now to address this question: how might lesbian and other queer texts be written and read in postcolonial (con)texts? I read Renée's novelistic project as a writerly one. Inherent in what I call a postcolonial textuality in these two novels is the writerly process of "rereading which draws the [classic] text out of its internal chronology" (Barthes, *S/Z* 16) and proceeds from the Barthesian principle that the writerly text of these two novels rereads "the traces of cultural inscription," in the classic text of British textual imperialism (Silverman 246). Postcolonial textuality in *Does This Make Sense To You?* and *Daisy and Lily: A Novel* is also evident in the discursive (re)constitution of lesbian and other subjectivities queered in this process of rereading.

Does This Make Sense To You? is a novel set in Aotearoa New Zealand. The time period extends from the early 1960s to the early 1990s. The characters in this novel are variously identifiable as Māori, Pakeha, heterosexual, lesbian, suburban, working-class, a truck driver, a bus driver, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, teenagers, students, actors, a thief, a Governor-General and his lady wife, and so on. The novel opens with middle-aged Flora Thornley standing alone in her garden. She says out loud to herself, "bugger it, I'll run away from home" (7). Flora's quandary centres on the fact that she has just received a letter from Chloe, the daughter she gave up for adoption over twenty years ago. Flora has recently made contact with Chloe, who has answered Flora's letter with the question: "I just want to know how a woman could give away her baby" (21).

Does This Make Sense To You? is a writerly articulation of the social and emotional implications of the Adoption Act of 1955,

in which Renée rereads the classic path of signification in the discursive constitution of a normative hetero-respectability for the colonialist nation New Zealand.¹⁷ The writerly text of *Does This Make Sense To You?* also traces the discursive constitution of a lesbian subjectivity in a colonialist (con)text. This latter process centres on Flora's lesbian friend Ka. In a protracted correspondence with Chloe, Flora intermittently repeats and addresses the question "Does this make sense to you?" In this writerly strategy, which fragments the classic text of hetero-colonialist respectability, "does this make sense to you?" is a question which focuses not on the veracity of what is being represented. Rather, it is a question which orients the reader to how meaning (that is, sense) is produced.

Flora's begins by outlining the magnitude of the task she faces:

Dear Chloe, you ask how a woman could give away her baby. I will answer your question but the only way I can do it is to tell you about me and Mum and Dad, Jean Weston, Elaine, the Home, Ka, and a million other things because they all have a bearing on it. (31-32)

Flora's personal shame in becoming pregnant is both a family secret and a national secret. Flora's father and mother keep this secret, initially, by keeping her locked up and out of sight at home. In the wider (con)text of a colonialist economy of respectability, her parents' success is an incomplete enforcement of the symbolic order of the nation.¹⁸ They then send her to the church-run Home for unwed pregnant women, and finally allow Chloe to be taken from Flora against her will. Flora remembers that one reason her mother had confidence in placing Flora in the maternity Home was that the board of trustees were all members of a church (104).

In the classic text, the semic code which relies upon the specificity of the proper name for its central term, functions to define persons, characters, and places in ideologically symptomatic ways (Silverman 250). In the classic text the semic code operates unobtrusively (Silverman 253). In a writerly deployment of "the Home" as a proper name, the semic code operates overtly in so far as it imitates rather than expresses family-based power relationships on which the nation relies. When the family can no longer conceal the nation's secret, the maternity Home

for unwed mothers is the metaphorical replacement for the Christian family home. The maternity Home also bears a metonymic relationship to the Christian colonialist family, the colonialist nation, and the British Empire (Silverman 110).¹⁹ The overt operation of the semic code in *Does This Make Sense To You?* also occurs in the figure of the Matron of the maternity Home who signifies *in loco parentis* as a metaphor for the mother of the nation.

A rereading of the classic (that is, holy) alliance between Christian church, the family, the colonialist nation, and the British Empire is pursued further when the Governor General, accompanied by his “lady” wife, pays a visit the Orphanage (120-21). In the writerly text of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, the semic code operates overtly in its signification of the Orphanage. In the classic text, the orphanage would signify as a place of comfort and refuge. In the writerly text of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, the Orphanage is (de)constituted as a place of exile for the “unadoptables,” the disabled children and mixed-race children who have no respectable place in the colonialist nation (101). As the Queen’s representative of the British Empire, the Governor General signifies as *in loco parentis* for the imperial Queen, for the girls’ absent fathers, and for their unborn children. The Governor General also signifies *in loco parentis* for the imperialist Christian God when he pauses “for reflection” in the maternity Home chapel (20).

In the church-run maternity Home, the unmarried girls’ family names are kept “confidential” (96-97). At their first meeting, Ka defiantly identifies herself to Flora as a “Porohiwi” from Mahia (98). She also insists on knowing Flora’s family name. In so doing, Ka makes it possible for them to maintain contact after they have left the maternity Home. As an adult, Flora reflects that she has kept the secret of her friendship with Ka for as long as she has kept the secret of Chloe’s existence (85). She poses the question as to why: “It’s not because she’s Maōri. At least I don’t think so. Lesbian? Possibly” (85).

In the writerly text of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, Ka’s adult lesbian sexuality is (re)constituted from the classic colonialist text of hetero-respectability. Impregnated as a teenager by a

Pakeha boy, Ka is aware that this confirms the belief that “Maōri girls are easy” (103).²⁰ As an adult, Ka works at “The Haven,” a refuge for battered women. Ka’s home is also a refuge for unmarried pregnant girls, whom Ka finds by putting advertisements in the paper and notices in the pub and supermarket. She offers them a place in “a private home with an understanding woman who had experienced pregnancy herself” (34). Flora learns that Ka “has placed seven Maōri and ten Pakeha girls over the last two years” (35). Ka tells Flora of her plans to expand this service with community assistance. Ka’s application for funding to help finance this venture evokes a moral outrage in the form of racist and homophobic letters to the local paper:

It is wrong that public money should be spent on funding for such a scheme. . . . “Ms” Porohiwi’s sexuality and politics make her unfit to be a supervisor of an organisation which deals with young women, pregnant or not. Feminists and lesbian feminists are responsible for the breakdown of the family and women like “Ms” Porohiwi should not be allowed to do further damage by perverting the minds of these unfortunate young girls . . . signed “Mother of Ten.” (52)

Ka’s reading of the objections to her enterprise is a sharp abridgement of the hetero-racist colonialist text:

It’s yet another wheeze for Maōri to take funding away from Pakeha, or it’s all a lesbian plot, or a mixture of both. We should all be taken out and shot. We’re filthy, perverted, sick and we shouldn’t be allowed anywhere near young girls. (35-36)

In the church-run maternity Home, unwed pregnant girls were punished for transgressions within a normative gender requirement prescribed as a heterosexual relationship properly contained within marriage. Their sexual transgression in becoming pregnant did not, however, leave the arena of compulsory hetero-gendered sexuality. The moral attack to which Ka is subjected as an adult lesbian is because lesbians are oppressed as queers by the operation of homosexual (not hetero-gender) stratification (see Rubin). Ka articulates the sexed-gendered-raced constitution of her Maōri lesbian sexuality in a colonialist (con)text where as a feminist she transgresses the law of hetero-gender affiliation, as a lesbian she is a sexual outlaw, and, as Maōri, she is raced sexually incontinent.²¹

The next letter to arrive completes the constitution of the classic text of lesbian sexuality in Christian colonialist (con)text:

God will not be mocked. If there is one unclean let them be cast out before they pollute the rest. Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord. It is bad enough when men engage in these filthy practices—it is unthinkable when women do. I think the birch should be brought back and these demented and evil people beaten until they repent and seek God's forgiveness and the Peace that Passeth all Understanding . . . signed "Happy in God's Love." (52-53)

Where women's sexuality is controlled through the ideological alliance of church, family, and colonialist-nation state, and there is no public discourse of lesbian sexuality, what lesbians "do" is, correlatively, "unthinkable."²²

The ideological (that is, textual) alliance of church, family, and colonialist-nation state necessary for the control of sexuality, reread in the writerly text of *Does This Make Sense To You?*, is also the stuff of the writerly text of *Daisy and Lily*. The protagonist in *Daisy and Lily* is Daisy, an aging, working-class, Māori lesbian. Lily Sanson is Daisy's Pakeha childhood sweetheart. Daisy and Lily, who have been estranged for forty years, have been reunited and now live together. Uncle Auntie (also known as Magda Porohiwi), is Daisy's Uncle Auntie, one of a community of Māori transsexual queens who runs Magda's Escort Agency. After Uncle Auntie's violent death, Daisy begins to write her "life course" (11).

In the classic text, the proairetic code establishes fixed sequences of actions. Daisy's "life course" is, by contrast, a non-linear narrative which, like the writerly text, "can be 'entered' at any point" (Silverman 247). In a writerly disruption of the inevitability of the syntagmatic order of the forward moving classic hetero-text, Daisy haphazardly gathers up events from her past.²³ Daisy states her reasons for writing her life course: "so Lily and Uncle Auntie would know that I understood there was more than one way of looking at things. You don't believe everything just because it's written down. You have to be wary" (15-16). In expressing both a distrust of what has previously been "written down," and also that there is "more than one way of looking at things," Daisy articulates the writerly process of rereading.

It is central to a Barthesian reading of the classic text that the symbolic code is linked “to the formulation of antitheses” (Silverman 270). Of these antitheses, or binary oppositions central to the organization of the cultural order, the most “dominant and sacrosanct . . . is that between the male and female subjects” (Silverman 270).²⁴ Barthes also suggests that in the classic deployment of the semic code opposing elements are set “ritually face to face like fully armed warriors” (*S/Z* 27). In the writerly text of *Daisy and Lily*, the symbolic code is disrupted by a repeated “passage through the wall of opposites” (*S/Z* 15).

This passage through the wall of opposites occurs in discursive (re)constitution of the postcolonial subjectivity of Uncle Auntie. This is best revealed in the writerly subversion of the symbolic code in conjunction with the semic code. In the classic text, the semic code operates in an overt fashion “where the single quality by which a character is defined actually coincides with that character’s name” (Silverman 253).²⁵ Duality, therefore, “is always implicit in the operations of the semic code since the attributes it clusters round a proper name derive their value from opposing ones” (Silverman 276). By linking two conflicting nominations, the agnomination “Uncle Auntie” disrupts this classic discursive economy.

In the classic text, this principle of the separation of opposites also applies to the economy of the body: “its parts cannot be interchanged, the sexes cannot be equivalent” (Barthes, *S/Z* 15). The queer constitution of Uncle Auntie’s transsexed body also illustrates the “transgression of the Antithesis, the passage through the wall of opposites” (Barthes, *S/Z* 15). Thus, in the writerly (de)constitution of the semic code, in conjunction with the (de)constitution of the symbolic code, the figure of Uncle Auntie signifies the “radical transformations which are registered within the larger cultural order when sexual difference is belied” (Silverman 272).

Daisy describes her first ever sighting of Uncle Auntie: “There she stood, resplendent in jet black, froth of white lace at the neck. She wore black stockings, high-heeled black patent leather shoes and on her head was a large black picture hat with huge red velvet roses rioting across the rim” (67). Daisy reads Uncle

Auntie's cross-gendered appearance as a kind of impersonation. In the writerly text of *Daisy and Lily*, Renée draws attention to gender "as a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself" (Butler 21). She does this in her ironic characterization of Daisy's and Lily's next-door neighbour, Doris, who "with her [own] cuban heels, her liking for blue floral dresses and white cardies, triple-string and clip-on fake pearls," considers that she "had never met anyone like Uncle Auntie in her entire life" (71). For Doris, Uncle Auntie's so-called imitation "produces the very notion of the original," which reads, in the writerly text of *Daisy and Lily*, as "an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself" (Butler 21).

Daisy recalls her own attempts at hetero-respectability in her young adulthood when she declared that she liked clothes that are nice, "Quiet. Respectable" (68). In a writerly rereading of the symbolic order, Uncle Auntie points out a certain failure in Daisy's adolescent attempts at hetero-respectability when she offers Daisy the benefit of her own hindsight: "Dressing yourself up in clothes that'd look better on your Auntie Maureen here's not going to stop awful things happening. It just means you're the one doing it to yourself. You think about that" (70).

None of the symbolic privileges usually afforded to the male subject are afforded to the transsexed figure of Uncle Auntie. Uncle Auntie is not only denied symbolic privileges; she is subjected also to violent sanctions for her gender (mis)appropriations. For example, "a bunch of drunken rugby fans on their way home from watching their team lose decided to do over the pretty boy who insisted on carrying a handbag" (23). The violence perpetrated against Uncle Auntie for her sexed-gendered transgressions is linked, in the writerly text of *Daisy and Lily*, with a more general symbolic and cultural violence against women.

Renée's exploitation of the writerly potential inherent in the antithesis culminates in a scene in the church at the funeral of Daisy's husband, Spenser. In this scene, the ideological (that is, textual) alliance of church, family, and imperialist-nation state is localized in Uncle Auntie's *imitation* of the so-called *real* Queen Mother:

It was then Uncle Auntie made her entrance. She wore her latest ensemble, a bright violet suit and hat to match with a burnt orange frilly blouse and high-heeled shoes to match. . . . She'd read somewhere that mauves and violets were kinder to one's complexion as one got older. "That's why the Queen Mother wears them so often." . . . She lifted a mauve-gloved hand in a Queen Mother salute towards the coffin. (60-61)

This juxtapositioning of queen mothers in the writerly text of *Daisy and Lily* challenges notions of imitation and originality. It also rereads the values correlative to the symbolic economy of so-called queens, where Uncle Auntie is a queen mother in kin-ship network of transsexual queens.²⁶ Uncle Auntie articulates her correlative symbolic value: "Queens, unless you're the Queen Mother of course, usually die young. It's all the cutting about and the pills. And the booze. And the white stuff. And the men we fall in love with" (19). The classic text of Western subjectivity is resolutely (de)constituted when Daisy asks Uncle Auntie: "How do you see yourself? . . . Maōri or not Maōri?" (165). Uncle Auntie replies, "I'm a queen. . . . that's how I see myself" (165);²⁷ she thus (re)constitutes her subjectivity already sexed-gendered-sexualized-raced as female-feminine-homo-black in the (con)-text of hetero-Christian colonialist nation New Zealand.

In my reading of two classic texts of British cultural imperialism, I have demonstrated a range of signifying practices underlying the discursive privilege accorded to Western subjectivity. Throughout the disparate territories which once constituted the British Empire, there is a plethora of such texts which discursively embrace the holy alliance of church and hetero-nation. These texts, so constituted, are ripe for unholy, queer readings. In my subsequent reading of segments from two novels by Renée, I have illustrated a rereading of the classic text of the hetero-Christian colonialist nation New Zealand, from which the writerly text of the postcolonial queer nation, Aotearoa New Zealand, emerges.

NOTES

¹ George Griffiths's *The National Anthem* points out that the original edition of *God Defend New Zealand*, printed in London in 1878, was issued in the name of George Jeffery, of Lawrence, New Zealand. Charles Begg Ltd. bought the copyright of the

music from John Joseph Woods, and held it until 1939-40, when it was purchased by the New Zealand Government. (Incidentally, "Godzone"—in the title of this article—is an abbreviation of "God's Own Country," the title of a poem by Irish immigrant, journalist, poet and parliamentarian, Thomas Bracken.)

- 2 Linked to British imperialism and its history of colonization beginning in the eighteenth century, the nomination Aotearoa New Zealand is a narrative of a bicultural nation. Biculturalism has been a contested feature of legislative and cultural politics of this nation since the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi / The Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 whereby Maōri and Pakeha accepted partnership rights and responsibilities. A legislative and cultural politics of biculturalism includes initiatives to enact and enforce the neglected principles of The Treaty of Waitangi. The meaning of these principles and hence the meaning of partnership rights and responsibilities is subject to ongoing debate. The nomination Aotearoa New Zealand at this point in my essay signifies a postcolonial, rather than a colonialist, discursive practice.
- 3 See, for example, Cherry Smyth; Michael Warner; Annamarie Jagose; Arlene Stein.
- 4 Silverman suggests that the writerly text engages the reader "in a productive rather than a consumptive capacity" (246).
- 5 Renée was born in the Hawke's Bay regional district of the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand in 1929, a year which marked the beginning of the Depression. She is of English/Irish and Ngati Kahungunu descent. Renée left school at age twelve and worked in a woollen mill, a printing factory, and a grocery-dairy. She studied extra-murally for a Bachelor of Arts Degree which she completed at The University of Auckland in 1979. Since the early 1980s, Renée has been a political and cultural activist. Renée, who is arguably New Zealand's most prolific lesbian writer, has been involved in a wide range of cultural endeavours. Renée established herself as a playwright early on in her literary career. At the time of writing Renée's plays total seventeen. Renée's adult novels are: *Willy Nilly: A Novel* (1990), *Daisy and Lily: A Novel* (1993), *Does This Make Sense To You?* (1995), and *The Snowball Waltz* (1997). These novels, published by Penguin (NZ) Ltd., are not distributed outside of Aotearoa New Zealand. Renée has had to rely, with very few exceptions, on local reviews to achieve a local post-publication presence for these novels. These reviews have been published, for the most part, in local, urban, and provincial newspapers whose readerships cover the greater part of Aotearoa New Zealand. If for no other reason than the constraints of brevity usually imposed in the genre of newspaper reviewing in Aotearoa New Zealand, reviews of Renée's novels have, in general, fallen short of an informed critique. Reviews commissioned by magazines and literary journals do not, in general, display any greater insights. A number of reviewers of Renée's novels conflate her literary reputation as a feminist playwright and aspects of her personal history in reviews which address and construct anti-feminist and/or anti-lesbian reading communities. While no one reviewer explicitly states that Renée's novels are either unreliable or unrepresentative of New Zealand and/or lesbian literature, I find this suggestion to be implicit across a range of reviews. To imply that Renée's novels are neither reliable representations of a local culture nor representative of lesbian writing is to read them from within this classical episteme of Western representation.
- 6 Together these codes replicate, organize, and naturalize the larger discursive field or symbolic order making it seem timeless and inevitable. Ideological consistency is also best served if only a few codes are activated by a given text.
- 7 Meaning is both successive (that is, layered) and agglomerative (that is, accumulative).
- 8 Silverman points out that segmentation is the "converse of suture" and that suture "involves the stitching together of signifiers in such a way as to induce a forward movement" (247).

- 9 My method of segmentation differs from that illustrated by Barthes in *S/Z* in so far as I have grouped textual segments together. My treatment of these grouped segments is an adaptation of Barthes's method.
- 10 The editorial note which precedes this text argues that Mrs. Creighton's "appeal to the girls of the Empire lays stress on the joy as well as the privilege of service" (39).
- 11 Silverman points out that "the classic text uses oppositions as a major structuring device though these oppositions are rigorously limited in the number that can come into play at any juncture, and in the manner in which they can be articulated" (243).
- 12 Silverman draws attention to "the voice within the fiction [which] claims responsibility for the discourse, [and] thus cover[s] over the cultural enunciation" (244).
- 13 Barthes argues that "there is no reason to make denotation the locus and the norm of a primary, original meaning. To do so is to arrange all the meanings of a text in a circle around the hearth of denotation" (*S/Z* 7).
- 14 It has been argued that colonial women do not share equivalence with the indigenous colonized. See, for example, Chandra Talpade Mohanty who critiques Western feminist scholarship as a form of "discursive coloniz[ation]" (334). In this context she challenges the practice of unifying a category "women" which, she argues, must necessarily change from one articulation to another. One of the consequences of this move is to "produc[e]/re-present a composite, singular 'third-world woman'" (334).
- 15 McClintock also distinguishes between, "the beneficiaries of colonialism and the casualties of colonialism" (11). She argues further that "the rationed privileges of race all too often put white women in positions of decided—if borrowed—power, not only over colonized women but also over colonized men" (6).
- 16 Slemon similarly refers to the concern within postcolonial fields of study with "the ways in which colonialism is viewed as an apparatus for constituting subject positions through the field of representation" and how colonial subjects are produced "through the manufacture of consent" (17).
- 17 Ann Else notes that "there is nothing 'natural' about the institution of adoption. On the contrary it demonstrates that our perceptions of families, children, and parents are largely socially constructed, and it is what we believe about them which matters, not what is 'natural'—so much so that it is impossible to tell what is natural even about the feelings of those involved. Shame and pride, guilt and anger, fear and courage, grief and joy may all be innate human emotional responses, but in modern society what arouses them is often socially determined" (xiii).
- 18 Ann Else reports: "Many of the post-war experts who set out to explain single pregnancy laid a good deal of blame on the woman's parents" (12). Else quotes Major Thelma Smith, who was for twenty years the Matron of Bethany, a private hospital and Home for unmarried mothers run by the Salvation Army in Auckland: "The primary cause of an out-of-wedlock pregnancy is concerned with faulty family relationships, often including a 'dominating mother' and a 'shadowy father'" (12-13).
- 19 Silverman points out that "in a metonymic formulation . . . each [term] recalls, but does not replace the other; [and] the distance between them is as important as the initial juxtaposition" (112).
- 20 Philip Holden argues that "putatively national and nominally masculine virtues of emotional and somatic continence . . . are reinforced in late British colonialist popular fiction through the comparison of male protagonist with Others of

- gender and race." The identity of British men is "established against a background of sexually incontinent memsahibs and a feminized indigenous population" (68).
- 21 Rubin refers to "hierarchies of sexual values—which function in much the same way as do ideological systems of racism, ethnocentricism, and religious chauvinism. They rationalize the well-being of the sexually privileged and the adversity of the sexual rabble" (13).
- 22 Rubin argues that outside of psychoanalytic contexts or morality crusades "sexual speech is forced into reticence, euphemism, and indirection" (19). Roland Barthes suggests that a lover's discourse is "a discourse forsaken by the surrounding languages; ignored, disparaged, or derided by them, severed not only from authority but also from the mechanisms of authority . . . driven by its own momentum into the backwater of the 'unreal'" (*A Lover's Discourse* 1).
- 23 Barthes argues that "the *direction* of meaning determines the two major management functions of the classic text: the *author* is always supposed to go from signified to signifier, from content to form, from idea to text, from passion to expression, and in contrast, the *critic* goes in the other direction, works back from signifiers to signified . . . the *author* is a god (his place of origin is the signified); as for the critic, he is the priest whose task is to decipher the Writing of the god" (*S/Z* 174).
- 24 Silverman refers to *Sarrasine*—the subject of Barthes's reading in *S/Z*—as Balzac's "writerly experiment" (270). Silverman points out that in *Sarrasine* "the symbolic field always exceeds biological difference . . . the phallus designates a cluster of privileges which are as fully capable of finding their locus in a female subject as in a male" (270). Zambinella is "a figure who obliges the symbolic code to operate in the absence of sexual determinants" (271). Who will enjoy the privileges of the symbolic? The disequivalence between sexual and symbolic differentiation in *Sarrasine* is a scandal attributable to the failure of a number of other economies where *Sarrasine* "represents the very confusion of representation, the unbridled (pandemic) circulation of signs, of sexes, of fortunes" (272).
- 25 Silverman points out that the semic code operates "by grouping a number of signifiers around either a proper name, or another signifier which functions temporarily as if it were a proper name" (251). Silverman offers the example of "Everyman."
- 26 Kath Weston argues that in the stereotyped "tragedy of 'gay life' [these people] are popularly supposed to incarnate this most sexual and least social of beings" (2).
- 27 Edmund White suggests that in homosexual vocabulary "'Queen' is almost certainly derived from *quean* (the Elizabethan word for prostitute)" (72).

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