

Archival Utopics: Annamarie Jagose's *Slow Water*

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Abstract

Annamarie Jagose's *Slow Water* (2003), a novel which looks back to the period before Pākehā occupation of these islands solidified into formal colonial rule, begins, curiously and somewhat provocatively, with a scene of settler absence: "All the night, from the darkness of my blanket, I watch the dead houses, Mr Clarke's house, Mr Williams's house, Mr Davis's house, all dead. Still dead, in the first curve of daylight. . . . The church roof points at the sky and you are gone from here."¹ Stressing reciprocity of desire as one of the relations made possible by colonial "entanglement,"² this letter, narrated by Philip Tohi, intimates the spectacle of eradication by which the expulsion of the missionary William Yate from the Church Missionary Society (CMS) was both expressed and enacted: "All your books are burned, your bed, even the picture of your sister. . . . Ashes from the fire fill my mouth and again I cry" (2).

Though the character William Yate is "gone" (1) from the scene of Jagose's elegiac opening passage, the historical Yate continues to figure in diverse archival spaces and historical discourses, both locally and internationally. While Tohi's letter, which offers one of only two brief sections in the novel narrated from and explicitly situated in New Zealand, is based on specific archival documents, the novel's refusal to yield immediate access to its subject is suggestive of the indeterminacy of the archive in which it intervenes. Accordingly, Lee Wallace's discussion of the Yate archive does not take as its subject "the historical figure, William Yate" but trains its critical focus instead on the "contradictory sexual meanings" that his name has accrued over time.³ Like Wallace's historical account, Jagose's novelistic retelling of Yate's love affairs and eventual disgrace is less interested in fixing the "final truth of his person" than in tracking the "different truth effects generated across his name from one moment to the next."⁴ This indeterminacy of meaning hardly marks Yate as exceptional, however. The broader field of settler-colonial history in New Zealand to which Yate belongs is marked by rifts and disturbances which continue to elicit, in our local and contemporary setting, ongoing revision and negotiation. *Slow Water* takes up this unfinished project of historical negotiation in part by appearing to evade it. The novel's fictional reconstruction of Yate's sexual affairs, especially with Edwin Denison, pre-emptively recovers the affective and libidinal energies—what Yate recalls as "the pure luminescence of what they traded between them" (305)—rendered illegible by the colonial archive. But while the novel serves in part to restore the affective intensities of same-sex desire to the historical record, at other moments it retains the very archival illegibility it ostensibly seeks to redress. This apparent evasiveness extends to the spatial organisation of its narrative: most of the novel is set at sea, far from the processes of appropriation, occupancy, and naming of land which have typically, and perhaps rightly, been construed as the proper domain of settler-colonial history.

This essay reads the novel against this immediate readerly sense of historical evasion by arguing that its archival register is connected to its maritime setting and to its displacement of the land as its key space. In *Slow Water*, the archive and the sea both name unsettled spaces in which histories of settlement can be apprehended in an emergent, inchoate, and above all *affective* register. Some time ago now, Stephen Turner suggested that to undertake this "valuable exercise" of apprehending and revising foundational myths of settlement in a contemporary context necessarily "misses the pervasive effect of contemporary settler culture

in New Zealand,” which is “rather a problem of living in the present, or *living without history*. This is to say that the conditions of the present are not merely reducible to events of the past, and that the will to forget the trauma of dislocation and unsettlement has taken the form of a psychic structure.”⁵ In the years since this argument was first made, the empirical basis for Turner’s diagnosis of mass cultural amnesia has come to seem increasingly untenable. Dougal McNeill finds little in “the actual record of literary production from the last two decades” to support Turner’s account of “a social formation on the run from its history.”⁶ But Jagose’s novel not only participates in what McNeill calls the “sustained revival” of historical fiction dealing with settler-colonialism during this period but develops a model for a kind of contemporary settler fiction in which, contrary to Turner’s account, “living in the present” cannot be construed as synonymous with “living without history.”⁷ Rather, it draws on the capacity of the historical novel to “engender in an aesthetic field of historical signification a punctum that appears singularly ahistorical—affect—but which is, because of the detail it cuts across and unites, a relay through which the historical can be said to be sensed before it is redacted.”⁸ If the colonial archive has served as the primary mechanism through which histories of sexuality and settlement alike have been redacted, then the “wide expanse” of the sea (161) emerges in Jagose’s novel as a space in which the affective residues of these archives can be sensed not as settled, coherent historical events but with the embodied and felt immediacy of “a past still living in the present.”⁹

Slow Water is significant in these critical debates for the way in which its archival register is both indebted to, but departs markedly from, the structure of the “romance of the archive” which has primarily shaped engagements with archival material in New Zealand literature to date.¹⁰ There is, most obviously, no character–researcher in Jagose’s novel to immediately cue the reader to its archival preoccupations. Existing critical accounts of the novel have nevertheless emphasised archival research, and its attendant impression of historical fidelity, as central to both the novel’s production and the reading effects it generates. Frances Kelly refers to *Slow Water*’s “maintenance of historical accuracy,” while noting that this is hardly the novel’s most significant achievement.¹¹ Lydia Wevers, while suggesting that the novel “does not brand itself as ‘historical,’” admires the “meticulous attention” the novel pays to documentary sources.¹² Novels operate according to very different discursive logics to those which organise historical exposition, however, and little attention is given, beyond these passing references, to the specific uses to which this material is put in the novel. Reading Jagose’s fiction in specifically archival terms, I suggest, lets us ground its complex treatment of settler-colonial histories in the material archives in which that history (at least nominally) resides. For the purposes of this essay, though, the term ‘archive’ names not only dispersed collections of documents or ephemera housed in libraries, museums, and other institutions, but encompasses, too, the broader set of cultural practices by which a given historical moment, person, or event achieves legibility *as historical* in the first place. Feeling for the “pulse of the archive” in Jagose’s novel allows us to see how the novel participates in these chaotic processes while also holding out the promise of a space in which archival logics do not apply.¹³

Archival Intrusions

LETTER XXIX.

FROM HENARE PIRIPI UNAHANGA, TO THE REV. W. YATE.

Sir, Mr. Yate, how do you do, my friend? This is my speech to you.

— *An Account of New Zealand*¹⁴

“This is my speech to you” (337): Phillip Tohi’s mode of address in the final section of the novel is reproduced verbatim from a letter written by Tohi himself and published in Yate’s own *An Account of New Zealand* (1835). Phrases lifted directly from historical documents offer the most tangible markers of the novel’s debt to the Yate archive. But Jagose’s archival appropriations extend to the subtleties of register and tone. The elegiac mode mobilised in these sections is drawn from the collection of correspondence from Yate’s congregation published in *An Account*: one correspondent wrote to Yate to “go in peace to England, and leave us all to cry when you are gone,” while another worried that “you will not return to this land again, till we are all dead.”¹⁵ Accordingly, *Slow Water*’s fictive extension of this correspondence also foregrounds loss, referring to the “[m]any who were here when you lived at the Waimate” who have since died (2). At times, the novel retrospectively imagines events which are only anticipated in its archival sources: Tohi’s reference to the death of “Richard and Abraham” (2) in the novel realises the concerns of another correspondent, who wrote to Yate that “Richard, and Abraham, and Temorenga, and Cosmo, are all ill; and it will not be long before they are called to go to God.”¹⁶ The novel, then, both deploys and imaginatively elaborates on an existing body of archival texts. Though Jagose has suggested that the novel’s idiom “doesn’t reference anything in particular, but references *the idea of being historical*,”¹⁷ the novel’s epistolary sections can nevertheless be followed beyond the borders of the text to their referents in the colonial archive.

This material does not necessarily advertise itself *as* archival. But archives, broadly conceived, are not peripheral to the novel’s concerns, but brought repeatedly into view. The novel’s “Acknowledgements” section notes its dependence upon “historical material, both archival and published,” and specifically mentions *An Account* among its key documents (341). But the novel itself at various moments draws our attention suggestively to colonial archives, and the knowledges which they at once produce and seem to contain or arrest. On the day allegations are first made against Yate in the novel, his sister, Sarah, accompanies the Taylors to the colonial museum in Sydney:

Sarah enjoyed a museum, the locked wooden cases more than their contents and the hushed dustiness of knowledge constrained. She did not care to read the plaques but looked at each object to see what it said about itself. It was her experience that most things humped their own truths with them unawares. It was as yet a small collection, mostly specimens of natural history, but edifying. Taylor stood a long while before that strange creature Major Mitchell designated a Nondescript. Certainly it appeared perfect in its singularity. (289)

An earlier scene in the novel makes much of the shells Yate had “collected in New Zealand for the British Museum” (153). But in place of the British Museum’s projection of a centralised archival space, the museum described above is not presented as a monolithic, inert repository of institutional knowledge and memory. Located in colonial Sydney, it instead points to what Thomas Richards has called the “remarkably modular structure” of the imperial archive, a term which describes a decentralised and “vast assemblage for circulating knowledge between the various specialised cordons of empire.”¹⁸ But far from what was imagined as the imperial archive’s “utopian space of comprehensive knowledge,”¹⁹ the Museum in *Slow Water* offers only “a small collection” (289). Citing the prominent surveyor Thomas Mitchell, and a “strange creature” so unfamiliar and “perfect in its singularity” that Mitchell can only designate it “a Nondescript” (289), the passage directs our attention to the largely provisional and improvisatory taxonomies by which the new colony and its objects were organised and knowledge about them produced.

The narrator's figuration of the museum as a space of "knowledge constrained," and the pleasure Sarah takes in the "locked wooden cases" rather than their contents (289), recall Derrida's compelling image of the archive as a site under "house arrest."²⁰ But as Ann Laura Stoler points out, the Derridean formulation suggests "no access to intruders."²¹ Disrupting the museum's under-glass logic, *Slow Water* stages exactly such an intrusion, rendering archival texts permeable, mobile, and available to the imaginative work of historical fiction. "Unless taken from newspapers of the day," we are advised, "all italicised passages in the Sydney chapters are taken from documents held either in the Colonial Secretary's Correspondence at the Archives Office of New South Wales or the Church Missionary Society papers at the University of Birmingham" (341). The Sydney chapters, then, which take the composition and exchange of correspondence among CMS officials as constituent narrative events, interpolate archival documents into the space of fictional reconstruction. Imaginatively restoring documentary material to the scene of its composition and initial reception, Jagose's fiction apprehends its sources, an archive of seemingly "endless letters" (301), in the moment of their production. Taylor's initial letter to Yate informing him of the "*many reports to your prejudice*" (291, emphasis in original) required "no false starts or rewritings," and yet writing it "had taken him more than an hour already" and he "sweated as if it were physical work" (291). Renouncing the hermetic logic of the "locked wooden cases" ascribed to the museum just two pages before (289), this scene both mobilises and interrupts its documentary intertext in order to make the Yate archives, and the act of writing, legible both as object and as process: "*My dear Sir, I feel I ought to give you some—* he hesitated a moment, then wrote in a strong hand, *advice*" (291). In another passage, the narrator refers to a pamphlet composed by Yate "on the small, gate-legged table in his rooms at Mrs Brown's" (300). Like many of the other archival documents absorbed by the novel, the pamphlet is virtually inseparable from the scene of writing, though its content is distinguished typographically from the surrounding text: "He wrote in the evenings mostly, his thoughts transparent to him at the end of the day, Edwin moving about in the adjoining room. *The flesh will always be striving for mastery and the body will never cease its endeavours to subdue the soul*" (300). Foregrounding the very "paper itself," which to Taylor "felt pestilent between his fingers" (294), these scenes place their archival sources, in all their tactile materiality, firmly at their centre.

Jagose's imaginative restoration of this material to the "quiescence and quickened pace of its own production"²² takes archival documents, as it were, out of the archive. In place of a collection of documents already lodged in libraries, museums, and other archival spaces, the novel figures the CMS and Yate archives as an emergent and dispersed body of documents, regulated by the "tricked-up trappings of proper procedure" and modes of "false civility" necessary to the competent performance of colonial administration (305). The novel's contemporary re-animation of this material allows the reader to sense colonial archives themselves in all their "deadening weight,"²³ but also to steal a fictionally-sanctioned glimpse at the material and affective circumstances attendant upon colonial documents as they were initially written, read, and circulated. In this way, the novel restores to view the "spasmodic and sustained currents of anxious labor that paper trails could not contain."²⁴

Omission, Concealment, Disclosure

What can novels contain that archives cannot? The chapters of the novel set in Sydney repeatedly draw attention to fragmentary details, euphemisms, and omissions in the CMS paper trail. In one scene, Samuel Marsden, reading Clarke's letter, "ran the glass over the page once more—*taking his departure for England, unwilling to commit to paper the disgusting details, the abominable practice*—before marking his place with his thumb" (328, emphasis in

original). The novel's attention to such omissions is revealing, since it gestures towards the forms of historically-embedded desire which, having been erased from the official archival record, might instead achieve legibility in the historical novel. In her extended reading of the Yate archive, Wallace arrives at the claim that same-sex sexuality, in being aligned with the ephemeral rather than the "historically eventful," does not "imprint the archive: it refuses to be collated in the official forms of history. It resides or remains outside history—neither fully lost nor fully recoverable—in a way that disrupts archival thinking."²⁵

Yet Jagose's novel seems at times to undermine and unsettle this figuration of same-sex sexuality as a radical disruption of archival logics. Yate's sexual acts necessarily claim a presence, however attenuated and diminished, in Jagose's archival intertext, given its positivist drive towards determining and substantiating the precise "mechanics of Mr Yate's sin" (330). This presence is negatively constructed in the suggestive gaps and elisions left behind by colonial officials. Upon receiving a letter from James Busby stating that "*I understand that he is ascertained to have made not fewer than 60 persons the instruments of his unnatural lust*" (327), Yate's advisor, Harrington, "arrested himself in the arithmetic to review his situation . . . Sixty. It worked out at a little more than one a week for a year. Not out of the question, he supposed" (328). The novel "applies the force of irony" to this arithmetical rationalisation of sexual lives, and the persistent efforts of the CMS agents to make transgression quantifiable and manageable.²⁶ Recalling the epistemic anxieties of Major Mitchell's "Nondescript" museum exhibit (289), these passages trace the construction and subsequent dissolution of epistemic categories and taxonomies. The frustrated attempts of the CMS functionaries to organise sexual subjects, behaviours, and acts into "grids of intelligibility" take place in the absence of any rhetorical system for them beyond the idioms of scandal or perversion.²⁷ In the novel's other discursive venues, references towards sexual transgression are even more elliptical. In one scene, a naive Miss Button, looking over a newspaper report ("*We hardly know how to deal with them—yet they are of a very interesting nature*" [320]), makes a "very pretty suggestion" in the ear of her mother about the nature of the acts at the centre of Yate's disgrace:

Nothing half as bad as that, my dear. Mrs Button smiled though she could have laughed. It's when one gentleman uses another for a lady, she said and went to lie down an hour. Miss Button read the papers again slow, not sure what she had learned. Her mother would tell her anything but much remained for her to explain to herself. (321)

Mrs Button's amusement at her daughter's uncomprehending reading of the report suggests that despite the encoding of sexual acts within the censorious and euphemistic regimes of legalese and colonial decorum, a kind of common sense emerges among the novel's characters. A process of collective decoding and recognition makes these acts, even unwritten as they are in their specifics, publicly intelligible. In this newspaper report, itself an archival document "taken from the newspapers of the day" (341), concealment and disclosure are not easily distinguished; their proximity and ambiguity instead recall the open secret's "double bind of a secrecy that must always be rigorously maintained in the face of a secret that everybody already knows."²⁸ Though same-sex sexuality may not, to the figure of the researcher, indelibly "imprint" the archive in these embedded texts,²⁹ Jagose's fictional reconstruction suggests that it remained legible to original readers all the same.

The theoretical commonplace that colonial archives are necessarily withholding or evasive on the subject of transgressive sexualities underwrites a body of recent historical scholarship in which the colonial archive is seen as exemplary of, or even functionally equivalent to, the closet.³⁰ The interpretative and investigative force of these accounts, as

Wallace notes, inevitably turns towards the disclosure of “the sexual secrets of the past.”³¹ Though Jagose’s novel begins with “the same archival sources” available to these historians, her fictional reconstruction of the Yate affair serves not to iron out discrepancy and establish proof but to preserve the affective register and strangeness of sexual encounters, which even in their fictional iteration are difficult to record. . . . Jagose creates a representational framework that can move not only between objective and subjective perspectives but also preserves the oddly elliptical nature of sexual response in which bodily rhythms and escalations scarcely coalesce as narrative events, far less narrative events sturdy enough to pass as history.³²

My own argument owes much to this compelling reading of the novel against its archival sources. However, the opposition assumed here between the novel’s affective and archival registers may lead us to overlook points of continuity between them, and the considerable extent to which the novel articulates the embodied, affective work of memory itself in terms we might recognise as archival. Though at the beginning of the novel Yate “remembered this feeling of being on board ship,” he recognises the sensation as “not really a memory . . . but a knowledge, locked away in his body and only emerging in the form of recollection at the faint shiver of the deck’s planking, the rush of the ship itself” (3). Knowledge, in other words, is secured in the sailor’s body much as it is in the glass cases of the colonial museum. Even to be called so at all, the narrator suggests elsewhere, knowledge must be “lodged in the body, burrowed tick-like beneath the skin, sure as any memory” (75). A living archival space, the body is construed as a “dark world” which records “no future, only past” (109). Much later in the novel, with the prospect of separation looming, the narrator notes Yate’s “different alertness” to Denison upon their arrival in Sydney, an alertness which Yate recognises “as remembering, a kind of storing of the details of his person against his departure” (286–87). What the novel foregrounds at these moments is the embodied and yet quasi-archival work of memory itself.³³ Jagose’s novel keeps these embodied archives open to the reader even as their erotic and emotional material is absorbed into the grammar of colonial administration.

The novel keeps everything at stake in the trail of administrative documents left behind by this “legal matter” (298) in plain sight—including Yate’s life, with the figure of an executioner in one scene transforming the “dark spars of the gallows from monument to instrument” (325). But this archive, crucially, touches not only Yate but also the Māori men with whom he became erotically linked, and whose own depositions would later serve as evidence against him. Phillip Tohi’s epistolary framing of the novel, despite emerging from and bearing textual genealogies to the Yate archive, offers a reflexive commentary on its “piecemeal partiality.”³⁴ Far from participating in the imperial archive’s fantasies of comprehensive epistemic mastery, Tohi’s letter draws attention to its unfeeling logic of selection, and the specific empirical and investigative remit which governed the collection of affidavits from Yate’s congregation: “They hooked our words from us like eels and wrote down only what they chose. Mr Davis read to me what I had said but it was only pieces like the remains of a feast after the men have eaten” (337).

Making Time Slow

. . . a utopian projection—a cease-fire declared in the midst of hostilities that do not thus simply cease.

— D.A. Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* (39)

The thing about the sea was, it was a-historical . . .

— Ian Wedde, *Symmes Hole* (79)

In the pages before the reader learns of the arrival of the affidavits from New Zealand, Yate boards another ship, Captain Crawford's *Ulysses*, accompanied by Edwin and his sister, Sarah: Edwin, Yate and Sarah: the three of them were the only passengers which was as well since they recognised in themselves a perfect society. . . . Hating Sydney, Yate was impatient to haul anchor, not for England, that indifferent country, but to be again a society afloat on a world of water, answerable only to the eye of God that was the sky itself over the brawling ocean. (332)

Like Yate, I am eager at this point in the discussion to leave Sydney behind and embark. However, this passage is worth dwelling on briefly, since it constructs the space of the ship, and the "world of water" which it moves across, as a site outside the regulatory mechanisms of the settler colony. If, as I have suggested, the disciplinary structures of the colonial archive do not permit Yate's sexual liaisons and relationships to achieve their proper affective legibility, what are the conditions of possibility for their visibility elsewhere in the novel? To put the question slightly differently, what are narrative conditions that enable the novel's "utopic projection of requited love between two men"?³⁵ Answering these questions requires us to read the "utopian space" of the imperial archive³⁶ alongside the maritime space across which Yate's story unfolds. Attending to the specific political, affective, and sexual possibilities afforded by this space enables us to recover critical currents obscured by nationalist accounts preoccupied with modes of settler occupancy on land, and to extend existing critical accounts which read the novel in terms of a utopian negotiation between the concrete, present realities of settler-colonialism and what the narrator calls the "incoherent shapes" of "other possibilities" (6).

Contemporary literature and criticism dealing with settler-colonialism in New Zealand have typically, and perhaps rightly, taken land as their key object.³⁷ But if the sea has been passed over in earlier fictions and their attendant modes of criticism as "a dead zone between histories that unfolded on land," to borrow Margaret Cohen's phrase, *Slow Water* restores it to narrative and thematic centrality.³⁸ The novel implicitly demands readerly attention to the restless mobility of its narrative, with the heading of each chapter incrementally and precisely mapping out, in latitude and longitude, the movement of the *Prince Regent*, another space "afloat on a world of water" (332), from Gravesend to New South Wales. This trajectory is, crucially, temporal as much as spatial. The space the novel marks out for its same-sex encounters is organised around a suspended temporality which is specific to the rhythms and indirections of a sea voyage, and which operates in opposition to the empirical and archival technologies which are stirred into motion upon landfall in Sydney. In the scenes of the novel set at sea, accordingly, emotionally-charged and lovingly-rendered scenes of same-sex sexuality, reasserted and recovered from archival obscurity and disciplinary suppression, are coded as quasi-utopian moments in which historical and archival temporalities are suspended. If, as Wallace suggests, the "bodily rhythms and escalations" of the novel's fictional reconstructions hardly solidify as historical or even narrative events,³⁹ this is perhaps because Yate's sexual encounters are aligned instead in the novel's textual economy with the embodied immediacy of the present, as "the only way Yate knew to make time slow, to tether himself to now, to here, against the spring tides of an unwanted future" (301).

Yate's desire to "make time slow," in its suggestive gesture towards not only the dilations which mark narrative time but the "spring tides" of historical inevitability, foregrounds the prolonged conditions of stasis and temporal suspension which occasion and make possible his relationship with Denison at sea. It is less the sea itself or "the movement of the ship" (173) than *lack* of motion which renders same-sex desire thinkable as a narrative possibility. Standing

for several hours beneath the “dead sails” of the ship, Yate casts fragments of a broken saucer into the “still water” while contemplating “Mr Denison’s porcelain whiteness that he now carried with him, heavy at his neck as the errant sailor’s albatross” (75). In its figuration of erotic attachment as a compromising and involuntary relation, the novel recalls the slowness and stagnation of Coleridge’s *Rime*: the other passengers are made “restless” by the “motionlessness of the vessel, day following day and still she held her place as if anchored” (161). But the effects of this stasis, for Yate at least, are inverted. The narrative discourse instead lingers and luxuriates in a stalled, expansive temporality, and in the pleasures afforded by long stretches of uninterrupted time with Denison:

Yate crossed the cabin on quick feet, heels lifted from the chill of the bare floor, his skin cooling as he went, bringing to bed the gift of his body’s warmth. His only gift, he thought, not at all troubled, even serene, his hands having the run of Edwin’s skin, the bluish white of unwalked snow, the slow bunch of thigh muscle and his breath thickening and slowing. They slept easily together from the first, the one curled around the other. He had his lips at Edwin’s neck, the unprotected curve of it, the smell of old laundry rising from his shirt as it warmed between them. Hours yet till breakfast. (223)

Time itself in this passage seems to thicken and slow with the bodily and mental rhythms of its characters, not least the “slow bunch” of Denison’s thigh and Yate’s own untroubled, “serene” domesticity. Yate, tellingly, finds that there is “no urgency in him” to arrive in Sydney (209), and even entertains the “fanciful” notion of “being wrecked at sea and making land somewhere with Mr Denison” (174).

This description of the experience of arrival on land as “an untethering” underscores the broader figuration of the ship as an enclosed space of heightened sexual possibility in which Yate might “tether himself to now, to here” (301). But although I have suggested that the novel invites us to read the sea as fundamentally distinct from the regulatory space of the colonial archive, Yate’s seeming desire to gain purchase on a static point within historical flows has much in common with the “utopian space” of the archive.⁴⁰ It is significant that, in *Slow Water*, the sea becomes an object of archival knowledge as much as a physical space: one of the dispersed archives on which the novel draws is a collection of “shipboard diaries,” which became a crucial source for the author of “details of life at sea in the 1830s” (341).⁴¹ But this is only the most obvious sense in which the sea and the archive turn out to be overlapping spaces in Jagose’s novel. Sea narratives have long been animated by a desire to suspend and preserve the historical conditions they record, in the face of what seems like their inevitable or even imminent erasure. This is, for instance, the expressed project of the eponymous narrator of Herman Melville’s *White-Jacket*, who seeks to freeze naval traditions “in the nick of time” before their disappearance.⁴² These utopic figurations of a rupture in, or space of respite from, irrepressible historical currents—whether they take the archive or the sea as their focal point—are necessarily fanciful. But they are fantasies which wear their politics openly and visibly. For Dougal McNeill, *Slow Water*’s “utopian impulse” owes much to its pre-1840 setting: its narrative, “set before Māori-British relations had hardened into the certainties of colonisation,” courts a sense of “open possibility” by rendering “Pākehā settlement something still to come, undecided, thinkable only now in its contingency.”⁴³ For McNeill, too, the sea operates here as a space which enables the temporary concealment, if not the interruption, of always already settled historical trajectories. During Yate’s voyage, the “inevitability of his disgrace and persecution can thus, for the reader, be ignored for whole stretches of narrative reconstruction.”⁴⁴ The sea and the ship together function, in this reading, as a hermetic and

utopic zone on which, for the duration of the journey, the exterior historical realities of settler-colonialism and compulsory heterosexuality make scarcely any impression.

However nuanced in its expression, this account risks reconstituting the sea as the historical “dead zone” which Margaret Cohen urges us to reassess and recover.⁴⁵ Moreover, as an unsettled place of imaginative respite from settler-colonial certainties on land, the *Prince Regent* is compromised at best. Just as the novel, as I have already suggested, quietly upsets the putative division between its archival and affective registers, the narrative discourse—even at its most apparently intimate moments—at times repeats the poetics of settlement which the novel has been seen to place itself outside. The erotics of onboard sexual licence frequently converge, in Jagose’s lyrical constellations of images, with the sensual and tactile evocation of the land. This convergence is especially conspicuous in Yate’s initial encounter with the cook, his thoughts “winging about his head like insects kicked up from the damp evening grass” (146). With his “face pressed to the bench,” Yate detects “the resinous smell of the tree still in the wood,” and leaves the galley behind “as if it were another country, the cook’s luminous teeth his last view of the shore” (148). Descriptions of Edwin, or more precisely “the smell of him, leaf fires and damp earth” (216), often display similar recourse to the sensuality of the land.

Wevers has already noted these links between Yate’s sexuality and the “fresh landscapes of New Zealand” in the novel’s descriptive patterning.⁴⁶ But often these associations exceed the landscape itself to encompass the specific processes—not least surveying—by which the land is made over by and inscribed within settler-colonial regimes of private property. The “mute communication” which governs the encounter between Armistead and Mrs Button is interrupted, for the latter, not only by the thought of her “dear indulgent husband, only yards away” but of “his surveyor’s maps spread open on the table”: “From their black-inked notations she could not tell what sort of place the underside of the world might be but feared New South Wales was most substantial in the mapping . . . a vast spread of a country inhabited only by ambitions of a topographical character” (131). In another scene, having viewed a likeness of a crew member’s love interest, Mr Taylor is unable to shake off the image of “the warm gape of the woman’s privates, every detail distinct, laid out like a surveyor’s landscape” (215). Invoking similar processes of settlement, Mary Ford’s voyeuristic participation in the Parkers’ sexual relationship culminates, in one scene, in a “shivering expectant silence as when, during land clearing, a great tree is about to fall” (72). The broader descriptive and rhetorical overlap in these scenes between settlement and the novel’s libidinal energies indicates the extent to which any utopic projection of love between men cannot be neatly disentangled from the utopian programme of settlement:

Yate saw [Edwin] going easily between the carters and the men, nursing against his chest the deal box of bulbs that would never reach New Zealand. That was the thing that grieved him most, to be forbidden the country he loved, Waimate the one place that made a natural sense of him. Whenever he thought of New Zealand, it was always a homecoming . . . the English steeple and the three hip-roofed houses strung along the rise above wheat fields that rippled at evening like a grass sea. And this time his imaginings were curlicued with the thought of Sarah . . . the end of her day the end of his and the unlicensed addition of Edwin, new minted as when first he saw him off Deal this February gone, master of a schooner trading up and down the New Zealand coast. Hard to think of the bulbs shuffling in their chaff in leaded darkness. (333)

In one sense, it is the actual unavailability of this fantasy—Yate, like the box of flower bulbs which occasions his meditations, will “never reach New Zealand”—that enables the

“unlicensed addition” of his male lover. Yate’s attachment to this “forbidden” country as “the one place that made a natural sense of him” asserts, as for Heberley in Ian Wedde’s *Symmes Hole*, the “natural terms of his occupancy”—though a version of the Wakefeldian vision of “English gardens of droopy elms” is present here, too.⁴⁷ My purpose here is not to suggest that the novel as a whole is unwittingly continuous with the project of settler-colonialism.⁴⁸ Rather, these momentary confluences of sexual and settler idioms suggest the logic of a “text’s utopic projection undone by the logic of that text’s language.”⁴⁹ If the sea, then, might be said to offer an extra-archival zone of historical suspension in which subjects are “answerable only to the eye of God” (332), the imminent and ongoing realities of settler-colonialism continue to intrude upon it. This is not history forgotten or in abeyance so much as history in a different, more fluid register.

Just as every utopia “secretes signs of the conflict that it fulfils the wish to abolish,”⁵⁰ *Slow Water* generates utopic projections only to interrupt and undermine them. Confronting the question of desire squarely, and forestalling its subordination to archival logics, Jagose’s novel marks out a compromised space at sea for the registration and representation of sex between men. But these relations are marked always by a sense of their imminent closure, as well as their rearticulation as a juridical and administrative matter upon arrival in Sydney. The novel may, for the most part, locate itself outside of and prior to formal colonisation, but it nevertheless intimates and, especially in its final pages, keeps in view all that is yet to come: “All the chiefs have a feast at Waitangi, put their names on the book and call three cheers” (338).

My discussion ends, in some sense, where it began—with Philip Tohi at Waimate. Whatever affective and emotional possibilities they afford, it becomes especially untenable to read the sea or the ship as spaces which are wholly external or resistant to colonial and archival logics when they are enclosed at each end by epistolary sections based on documents lodged in the colonial archive. While many of these documents are distinguished by their emotional illegibility, written in prose “too picked clean to carry the mess” of a single authorial sensibility (303), Tohi’s letter calls attention instead to its distinctly personal, affect-soaked idiom. The novel’s final section combines a gesture to those lives and forms of desire which are “written down nowhere” and an announcement of itself as an act of writing. It thus marks Yate’s and the letter writer’s own compromised coming-into-being as archival subjects: “From me is this, from your boy Philip Tohi that you called Piripi, written with my pencil at the Waimate, to Mr Yate. This is all my speech to you. This is all” (339).

¹ Annamarie Jagose, *Slow Water* (Wellington: Victoria UP, 2003), 1. Subsequent citations given parenthetically in text.

² The term is Tony Ballantyne’s, who notes that “while thinking about empires through the metaphors of ‘meetings’ and ‘encounters’ allows us to imagine stable and discrete cultural formations existing after cross-cultural engagements,” the term “entanglement” better evinces the ways in which the period preceding formal colonisation drew together and integrated cultural thought-worlds in “new and durable, if unpredictable, ways.” Tony Ballantyne, *Entanglements of Empire: Missionaries, Māori and the Question of the Body* (Auckland: Auckland UP, 2015), 17.

³ Lee Wallace, *Sexual Encounters: Pacific Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2003), 87.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Stephen Turner, “Settlement as Forgetting,” in *Quicksands: Foundational Histories in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand*, ed. Klaus Neuman, Nicholas Thomas, and Hilary Ericson (Sydney: UNSW P, 1999), 21 (emphasis in original).

⁶ Dougal McNeill, “‘While History Happens Elsewhere’: Fiction and Political Quietism, 1990–2014,” in *A History of New Zealand Literature*, ed. Mark Williams (New York: Cambridge UP, 2016), 300.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2011), 66.

⁹ Cesare Casarino, *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis* (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 2002), 48.

¹⁰ The term is Suzanne Keen’s, from her *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2001). When it appeared in 1994, C. K. Stead’s *The Singing Whakapapa* furnished a local variation on the genre, framing its account of the missionary agriculturalist John Flatt in the 1830s as an archival quest narrative carried out by Flatt’s descendant Hugh Grady and his research assistant, Jean-Anne Devantier. Stead’s novel spends considerable stretches of narrative time among the same archive of CMS documents which are interpolated into *Slow Water*’s own narrative discourse, and offers a local model for how the figure of the archive might offer a framing device for contemporary negotiations of settler-colonial histories which have yet to be fully recovered. See C. K. Stead, *The Singing Whakapapa* (Auckland: Penguin, 1994).

¹¹ Frances Kelly, “Antipodean Victoriana: History and Fiction in Annamarie Jagose’s *Slow Water*,” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 46, no. 1 (2011): 55.

¹² Lydia Wevers, “‘Poor Mr Yate’: History, Sex and the Closet in *Slow Water*,” in *Floating Worlds: Essays on Contemporary New Zealand Fiction*, ed. Anna Jackson and Jane Stafford (Wellington: Victoria UP, 2009), 99.

¹³ “Pulse of the archive” is Ann Laura Stoler’s phrase: *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2009), 35.

¹⁴ William Yate, *An Account of New Zealand; And of the Formation and Progress of the Church Missionary Society’s Mission in the Northern Island*, ed. Judith Binney (Wellington: Reed, 1970), 278.

¹⁵ Yate, *An Account*, 266, 277.

¹⁶ Ibid., 280.

¹⁷ “An Interview with Annamarie Jagose,” by Madeleine Byrne, *Antipodes* 18, no. 2 (2004): 131 (emphasis mine).

¹⁸ Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), 16–17. Yate himself participated in this production and dissemination of imperial knowledge, with his *Account* following the Royal Society model for travel writing and offering a “lengthy taxonomy” of local flora and fauna, including “extensive catalogues of trees, birds, fish, reptiles, insects, shell, and minerals,” as well as sensationalist ethnographic accounts of “the manners and customs of the people” for a metropolitan audience. Lydia Wevers, *Country of Writing: Travel Writing and New Zealand 1809–1900* (Auckland: Auckland UP, 2002), 102.

¹⁹ Richards, *Imperial Archive*, 11.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1996), 2.

²¹ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 24.

²² Ibid., 35.

²³ Ibid., 19.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Lee Wallace, “Outside History: Same-Sex Sexuality and the Colonial Archive,” in *Embodiments of Cultural Encounters*, ed. Sebastian Jobs and Gesa Mackenthun (Munster: Waxmann, 2011), 70. Wallace’s argument draws upon but departs usefully from Stoler’s account of the affective register of colonial archives. For a discussion of the “discursive density around issues of sentiment and their subversive tendencies” in such archives, see Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 58.

²⁶ Wallace, “Outside History,” 72.

²⁷ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 24.

²⁸ D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1988), 195.

²⁹ Wallace, “Outside History,” 70.

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- ³⁰ Ibid., 65. Robert Aldridge, for instance, finds “something of the ‘coming-out’ story” in the narrative of Yate’s life. Robert Aldridge, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 227. Lydia Wevers, reading *Slow Water* as to some degree continuous with Jagose’s queer-theoretical work, carries this presentist construction of sexual subjects over into her account of Jagose’s novel, locating at the text’s heart “the opaque and transparent closet, the closet which both discloses and conceals” (Wevers, “Poor Mr Yate,” 102).
- ³¹ Wallace, “Outside History,” 65.
- ³² Ibid., 71–2.
- ³³ On some of the possible objections to the figuration of memory in archival terms which I propose here, see Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2001), 66–69.
- ³⁴ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 19.
- ³⁵ Wevers, “Poor Mr Yate,” 101.
- ³⁶ Richards, *Imperial Archive*, 11.
- ³⁷ Perhaps because it draws upon the same archives as *Slow Water*, one thinks again here of Stead’s *The Singing Whakapapa*, which takes transactions concerning land as key narrative events. Dougal McNeill nominates *Slow Water* and Hamish Clayton’s *Wulf* as recent historical novels which challenge what he terms “the hydrophobia of neo-nationalist criticism.” McNeill, “While History Happens Elsewhere,” 303.
- ³⁸ Margaret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2010), 14.
- ³⁹ Wallace, “Outside History,” 72.
- ⁴⁰ Richards, *Imperial Archive*, 11.
- ⁴¹ See, for example, Pamela Statham and Rica Erickson, eds., *A Life on the Ocean Wave: The Journals of Captain George Bayly 1824–1844* (Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1998). This seafaring archive appears and reappears throughout the novel alongside more recognisably literary rehearsals of maritime thematics, including an extended play on “Mr Coleridge’s famous verse” (190), commentary on James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Red Rover* (28), and an almost imperceptibly slight reference to Melville’s “handsome sailor” (296).
- ⁴² Herman Melville, *White-Jacket; or, The World in a Man-of-War*, eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston: Northwestern UP and Newberry Library, 1970), 282. Cesare Casarino notes: “To preserve ‘in the nick of time’ means . . . to stop a specific historical moment in order to keep it moving within itself and according to its own particular trajectories, in order to preserve it not as the dead and spent past but as a past still living in the present, even as the memory trace of its own disappearance.” Casarino, *Modernity at Sea*, 48.
- ⁴³ McNeill, “While History Happens Elsewhere,” 301.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 302.
- ⁴⁵ Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea*, 14.
- ⁴⁶ Wevers, “Poor Mr Yate,” 105.
- ⁴⁷ Ian Wedde, *Symmes Hole* (London: Faber, 1986), 12, 191.
- ⁴⁸ This charge has been levelled, in various forms, at Wedde’s novel. For a bravura display of this kind of trenchant interpretative suspicion, see Linda Hardy, “Natural Occupancy,” in *Asian & Pacific Inscriptions: Identities, Ethnicities, Nationalities*, ed. Suvendrini Perera, 213–27 (Melbourne: Meridian, 1995). For a broader commentary on the hermeneutics of suspicion which have emerged locally in the wake of *Symmes Hole*, see Dougal McNeill, “Unfinished Episodes,” *Double Dialogues*, no. 7 (2007). <http://www.doubledialogues.com/article/unfinished-episodes/>
- ⁴⁹ This phrase is from Jagose’s own monograph *Lesbian Utopics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 23.
- ⁵⁰ D. A. Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1992), 39.