

Schroder, Bethell, and [The Press](#): a correction to [The Oxford Companion](#)

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As the entry in [The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature](#) rightly observes, the Christchurch daily newspaper [The Press](#) played a significant role in fostering New Zealand literature from as early as the 1860s (when it published material by [Samuel Butler](#)), but more especially in the years following the First World War, and well into the 1930s and 1940s. However, one small correction needs to be made to that entry.

Although [Ursula Bethell](#) did publish a number of poems in [The Press](#), she was not recruited by [M. C. Keane](#), as is stated on p. 451, and nor was her poem '[The Long Harbour](#)' published under his editorship, as the paragraph implies. Bethell's connection with the paper began slightly later, when [J. H. E. Schroder](#) edited the literary page, and the paper was under the relatively short-lived editorship of [Oliver Duff](#).

The relationship was initiated by [Schroder](#)'s very favourable — if rather belated — review of [From a Garden in the Antipodes](#) (18 July, 1931),ⁱ which prompted a letter of thanks from [Bethell](#) (21 July, 1931), who felt that [Schroder](#) was 'the first reviewer ... to hear and see things as I did when writing.' Although [Bethell](#) had written promptly enough after the appearance of the review, it must have been a considered decision, for it required her, as she expressed it, 'to waive anonymity'. [From a Garden in the Antipodes](#) had, of course, been published under the pseudonym of [Evelyn Hayes](#). Not only was she glad of the recognition, but she was equally aware of the publicity value of the review, and surmised that it might 'cheer up' her publisher, [Frank Sidgwick](#), (to whom she promised to send a copy), for, as she observed, 'the times are nebulous & publication of verse a risky venture'.

[Schroder](#) replied (somewhat tardily) in turn (4 September, 1931), ending his letter: 'I wonder if I may, without impertinence, add that I should very much like to see some of your verses in [The Press](#)'. [Bethell](#) soon began sending poems to [Schroder](#), and like [Robin Hyde](#) sometimes sought his advice about individual words and lines. The first of her poems in [The Press](#) were '[Picnic](#)', printed on 7 November, and '[November](#)' printed on the 21st of that month. That these were indeed [Bethell](#)'s first contributions to [The Press](#) seems to be confirmed by her surprised response, communicated to [Schroder](#) in a letter of 19 December, at the receipt of a cheque for "£1/11/6 as remuneration for the two poems: she wrote that she had 'thought poetry in the "Press" was for honour and glory —

but not... I find a very charming bit of pink printed matter, on which I meditate with surprise and satisfaction’.

‘[The Long Harbour](#)’ did not appear for another year. The manuscript was enclosed in a letter to [Schroder](#) dated 17 November, 1932 and the poem was printed the following month. By that time, [Duff](#) had also left to become editor of the [North Canterbury Gazette](#) (to which [Bethell](#) also submitted poems for publication), and [The Press](#) was then under the editorship of [Pierce Freeth](#).

Work Cited

[Robinson, Roger](#) and [Nelson Wattie](#). Ed. [The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature](#). Melbourne: [Oxford University Press](#), 1999.

Endnotes

- ⁱ The correspondence between [J. H. E. Schroder](#) and [Ursula Bethell](#) is presently being edited by [Charlotte Elder](#) as an MA thesis. Her research has supplied the dates of [Schroder](#)’s review and of the publication of [Bethell](#)’s poems. [Bethell](#)’s letters are held in the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington; [Schroder](#)’s are in the Macmillan Brown Library in Christchurch.