

Ursula Bethell, 1874 – 1945

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One of the most frequently repeated comments about Ursula Bethell's poetry is that of D'Arcy Cresswell, who remarked, in his *Landfall* tribute, that 'New Zealand wasn't truly discovered ... until Ursula Bethell, 'very earnestly digging', raised her head to look at the mountains. Almost everyone had been blind before'. It is, of course, at best a partial truth, but it does convey something of her importance as one of the first wholly accomplished and distinctive voices in New Zealand poetry, and it rightly places her at the beginning of modern New Zealand poetry.

Mary Ursula Bethell was born at Horsall in Surrey, England, on St Faith's Day, October 6, 1874, the first of three children of Richard Bethell and Isabella Lillie. Her parents had both lived in New Zealand in the 1860s, but returned to London where they married in November, 1873. Within eighteen months, however, they had departed again for the Antipodes, first to Australia and shortly after to New Zealand, where their two other children, Marmaduke and Rhoda, were born. That journey was to be the first of many for Ursula Bethell between New Zealand and her 'loved and lost London'. The family settled at first in the Anglophile city of Christchurch, before moving north to Rangiora, the closest township to Richard Bethell's large sheep station, Pahau Pastures. The rural setting is dominated by the River Ashley in the foreground and Mount Grey in the background, and these quickly became significant and abiding elements in Bethell's imagination, evidenced by the long unfinished sequence 'By the River Ashley', published in full for the first time in her 1985 *Collected Poems*.

After Richard Bethell died of pneumonia in 1885, the family returned to Christchurch, where Ursula received her formal education at Christchurch Girls' High School. Subsequently she travelled to England, where she attended Oxford High School for Girls (1889-91), and later a finishing school near Nyon in Switzerland (1891-92). At Oxford she boarded with the Mayhew family, with whom she retained a lifelong friendship; many of the poems in *From a Garden in the Antipodes* were addressed to Ruth Mayhew (later Lady Head), and publication of the volume was arranged by Arthur Mayhew, who also corrected proofs for her. By the end of 1892, she was back in New Zealand and might easily have settled to a comfortable and moneyed lifestyle, but Christchurch must have held little but a cramped and narrow prospect for one who had already travelled widely. She spent three years teaching Sunday

school and doing social work among working class boys, but then returned to England in 1895, and for the next twenty-five years continued to travel between the two hemispheres before she finally settled in Christchurch in 1924.

Towards the end of the 1890s, after travelling around England with her brother and a friend, she spent almost two years in Geneva studying painting and music (several of her watercolours are preserved in the Macmillan Brown Library, Canterbury University), but when she returned to England she set aside any ambitions she might have had in the arts and devoted herself to social work, first with the Lady Margaret Hall Settlement in London, and then as a member of an Anglican community popularly known as the Grey Ladies. At the same time, she worked with Mary Walker's Dundee Social Union in Scotland. Ill health forced her to leave the Grey Ladies in 1901, although it seems likely she would have done so anyway – a 'private and confidential' letter of 4 April (c.1900) to Mary Walker expresses a quite negative attitude: 'those tiresome untidy feckless old greyladies irritate me without ceasing ... they are too boring for words'. Nevertheless, she maintained strong connections with formal institutions within the Church of England, and continued to perform social work within a broadly religious context. Her illness forced her to leave London, and she travelled across the United States, spending several months recuperating in the Santa Cruz mountains of California before returning to New Zealand, where she displayed the same interest in and enthusiasm for social work and educational work within religious contexts.

Still New Zealand could not long hold her; within a year she had again sailed for England, apparently with no intention of returning. She wrote in March of 1904 to former Premier Sir John Hall, describing her imminent departure as 'my final farewell to the Colony'. She stayed in England from 1904-1910, engaged in various occupations, predominantly Church-based social work or educational work, and keeping house for her mother and sister who at this time lived in Hampstead. Extant letters and papers in the Macmillan Brown Library suggest that she had a natural rapport with the young and a genuine concern for all those with whom she worked, and suggest at the same time that she could be bossily directive, and very conventional in her attitudes and expectations.

Despite the implication of her letter to Sir John Hall, she did return to New Zealand in 1910, and remained until 1913, becoming actively involved in parish work from the large rambling house she bought in the Christchurch

suburb of Merivale. But by the end of 1913, she was once more packing up to return to England. She travelled via Java and India, and reached Europe just as war broke out, but managed to leave Switzerland for England on one of the last trains. Less detail about her life in the ensuing years has survived, but she appears to have worked variously at a Montessori school, as a Cub mistress, a night supply waitress, at an Information Office for Soldiers, and at a School of Mothercraft associated with a Montessori Training College.

Holcroft's monograph suggests that her decision to join the Grey Ladies had been 'a crucial point in her life, a moment when she decided that her vocation must be religious and social rather than with the arts'. No doubt there is some truth in that; the range of occupations she engaged in through the first quarter of the twentieth century is evidence of the readiness with which she accepted an obligation to work on behalf of others. But at the same time it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there is something unsettled in her character and her circumstances. In her voluntary, self-chosen activities she displays a restlessness and rootlessness that is echoed in the many trips she made between England and New Zealand.

For what emerges very clearly from even a cursory examination of the first fifty years of her life is the way that journeying runs through it like a recurrent motif – as it does, for example, through the first volume of Janet Frame's autobiography. The journeying motif suits Frame's narrative so well that she would have had to invent it if it had not occurred; and although it does not have the same sort of narrative necessity in the case of Bethell, constant journeying certainly has the same effect, giving rise to a life which is divided almost equally between New Zealand and England, a life which traverses the oceans between these islands and the place she called home with a regularity that is astonishing in the days before air travel. There are, of course, other elements which surface as shaping and characterising her life – her interest in the arts and in music; her commitment to social work and to religion – but none seems to have quite the imaginative impact of these journeys. It is one of the ironies of her life that the poetry she wrote, and for which she now holds such a significant place within the story of New Zealand's emerging culture was written during the most settled period of her life, written when almost all that journeying was done.

Having returned to New Zealand after the War, in 1924 Bethell bought a newly-built bungalow which she named Rise Cottage, and established a home there with Effie Pollen, a younger New Zealand woman whom she had met almost twenty years earlier in London. Rise Cottage sits in the Cashmere

Hills, with splendid views of ocean and mountains, in particular the Kaikoura Ranges and the spectacular Southern Alps. There, Bethell toiled for the next ten years to transform the steep clay banks of her property into a garden, and there, too, she began to write poetry. The years at Rise Cottage, she confessed to Holcroft, were the happiest of her life; as she gardened, verses ‘bubbled up’ in which she recorded the day-to-day incidents of her life. Indeed, most of her verse, and virtually everything that she published in her own lifetime, was written during these years at Rise Cottage with the close friend and companion who, Bethell said, ‘prompted all’. *From a Garden in the Antipodes* is the best known of her books now, and it contains some of the most frequently anthologised pieces, but although Bethell acknowledged that it contained her ‘freshest writing’ it is not the volume she most valued herself. Although the first book had been dedicated to Effie Pollen, *Time and Place* was deliberately chosen and constructed as a memorial to Bethell’s dear friend. The third volume, *Day and Night*, included several pieces for which there had not been a place in the preceding work, but its dedication to Rise Cottage (‘limen amabile’) is further indication of the close connection that existed for Bethell between poetry, place, and person. It is appropriate, then, to consider all three volumes of her work together, despite the years that separate their formal publication.

For some time it was thought that there had been earlier books. Holcroft’s study refers to two other volumes, *The Glad Returning* and *The Haunted Gallery*, as her first two publications. The volumes are attributed to Evelyn Hayes, the pseudonym under which Bethell published her first work, and Holcroft clearly assumed a common authorship (a view that may appear to gain strength from her having been a close friend and the principal source of the biographical information in his monograph). Holcroft was obviously at something of a loss to account for these books, containing as they do weakly sentimental reminiscences of a school teacher in the English Midlands, in generally pedestrian verse forms, but it never occurred to him to question their attribution to Bethell. It did occur to Robert Erwin to do so, however, and he convincingly shows that there are no good grounds for attributing them to her. Not five, then, but three books, and a handful of uncollected poems: the simple truth is that her poetic oeuvre is not large – fewer than 150 poems – and it is on this small gathering that her reputation rests.

At first, Bethell had no intention of publishing her poems; they began as simple ‘metrical messages’ that she would enclose within letters home; to her sister Rhoda, and especially to Ruth Head and Arthur Mayhew. Gradually, however, friends in Christchurch came to know of them (H. C. D. Somerset’s

tribute provides a note on their private circulation) and she was eventually persuaded that the work deserved publication. With Mayhew's assistance, the first manuscript was submitted to Sidgwick and Jackson in London. Although Holcroft suggests that Frank Sidgwick had 'no hesitation in accepting them', in fact Sidgwick's initial response was guarded, noting the customary difficulty of publishing 'stuff of colonial or provincial interest;' within a fortnight, however, he responded more positively that 'we cannot afford to give the go-by to anything as good as this'.

Bethell's correspondence with Sidgwick reveals how reluctant she was to submit the poems and how surprised that they should be accepted 'en bloc', describing them as 'the slight inventions of an unknown *dépaysée*'. She deferred to the judgement of Sidgwick and Mayhew about details of selection and ordering of the poems, but she was quite clear that the volume was not to be published under her own name. The 'positive passion' with which she clung to anonymity is quoted by O'Sullivan; the undated draft of her letter to Sidgwick includes the phrases 'desperation', 'nervous persistence' and 'positive claustrophobia', and she asserts that 'in provincial New Zealand ... publicity is a really painful affair'. She is equally firm that the word 'from' is to be part of the title, stating that it 'helps to describe the nature of the work's content which ... began as metrical messages to Ruth Mayhew.... Nine of the pieces are directly addressed to her and ... many have an absent acquaintance in mind'.

In due course, *From a Garden in the Antipodes* was published under the pseudonym Evelyn Hayes (which she had already used for some poems submitted to an Australian journal, *The Home*) the origins of which she explained to Sidgwick (in the same letter): 'chosen in haste for the Australian magazine. Sounds rather flabby but there it is. Hayes – Sir Henry of Cork, my great great grandfather deported for life to Botany Bay for attempted abduction of Quaker heiress ... Evelyn – cowardly vagueness of gender'. The collection received generally favourable reviews, both in England and in New Zealand, although some of the remarks about charm and grace have a faintly patronising air about them, and the inclusion of reviews in gardening journals suggests some editors had interpreted the title of the book rather narrowly. The most substantial and perceptive of the early reviews was by J H E Schroder in the Christchurch *Press* (18 July 1931), who remarked on 'the vividness of phrase ... exhilarating quickness of mind ... and corresponding range and suppleness of feeling', and who is particularly attentive to Bethell's subtle use of rhythms.

Ostensibly, as the 'garden' of the title suggests, and as many of the first reviews affirmed, the poems deal (with a precision like that of Arthur Waley) with a small domestic world, peopled by 'a large *Persian Cat*, a small *Japanese Orange-Tree*, *Plants*, *Pests*, *Postmen*, and *Passers-by*', as the wrap-around jacket informs the would-be reader. And indeed, part of the appeal of the poems is their faithful record of that domestic life, with its 'rhythms of the stout spade / The lawn-mower and the constant hoe', alternating between scenes of 'waning May' and 'the last lap of winter', and celebratory responses to new life and growth which vividly convey her delight in the natural world.

But as Cresswell noted, the poet at times relaxes from her earnest digging and looks beyond the domestic scene to the mountains. It is an image that recurs throughout the volume; the activity of gardening is carried on against a wider backdrop of mountains and oceans, 'sublime splendours' to which the poet raises her eyes and in which 'the soul finds an appeasement', constant reminders of the permanent forces of nature and the brevity of human effort. Close observation of the seasonal cycles and a consequent focus on time and mortality are important elements in the verse, which faces this awareness of death with irony and quiet humour.

Conversational in tone and rhythm, the poems nevertheless reveal a fondness for unusual and technical words, and a delight in 'the accompaniment of words' which counters the solitariness of the gardener. Holcroft records his impression that for Bethell it was not rhythm or melody but words that came first. Indeed, words and language are as much a presence in these poems as is the garden which is their setting and subject, from the 'plain words' of the opening 'Foreword', through the 'lovely sounding names' of 'Catalogue' and the 'silence vibrant with words' in 'Names', to the concluding 'Dirge' which, re-interpreting Easter as an autumnal event, closes by proposing to 'say no word more'.

Although most of the poems of the following two volumes were written at the same time, there are significant differences in style and subject, and Bethell's instinct for keeping them separate was a sound one. *From a Garden in the Antipodes* has a greater coherence and integrity than her cautious letters to Sidgwick would lead us to expect. O'Sullivan rightly points to the more noticeable influence in the later volumes of Whitman, and especially Hopkins, whose influence can be felt in rhythm and phrasing.

One recurrent response to Bethell's poetry, and in particular to the first volume, has been to focus on the motif of expatriation that can be found there, poignantly expressed in the 'dreaming of loved and lost London' that is prompted by the arrival of mail from England. S. A. Grave would deny such a view; for Grave 'only the title strikes the note of an expatriate; Ursula Bethell had come home to something familiar'. But the term 'Antipodes', unambiguously Eurocentric as it is, strikes more than just a note of the expatriate: it assumes a Northern frame of reference; it defines the inhabitants of the Southern hemisphere as those whose footsteps are set in opposition to the norm. Most readers have agreed with E. H. McCormick, that 'the cultivated poems of her first volume appear to have been manifestly written in the spirit of an English expatriate'. Not that Bethell is dismissive of these Antipodes; far from it. Indeed, it is possible that the very notion of a creating a garden in the antipodes is a wry glance towards the fate of Eden, for one of the legends about Eden had it washed away during the flood to settle in the South Seas.

But the motif of expatriation extends well beyond the title: it can be found subtly hiding in poems such as 'Fortune', 'Compensation', and 'Primitive'; it can be seen in the recurrence throughout the volume of imported plants which are admired for the ways in which they recreate some semblance of an English garden; and it can be found, not lurking but full blown, in some of the most often quoted poems, such as 'Response' and 'Mail'. And it is there most tellingly in 'Primavera', which is nothing if it is not nostalgic, nothing if it is not a song of exile, based in part on the observed contrast between 'the strange September spring' and 'April in the greenwoods', but equally attentive to 'the wonted word out of the past that we never hear spoken', to language that is 'not understood'. The sweet sting, the smiles amid tears, the invocation of '*la patrie*' as '*le pays du désir*' are all telling reminders of the sense of loss and absence that affects the speaker in the poem. In Bethell's original manuscript, it was to have been the final poem in the book, and its placement there would have reinforced the sense of longing with which it concludes.

Lawrence Baigent notes that Bethell's seventy years were divided almost equally between the two countries and 'she remained throughout her life as much an Englishwoman as a New Zealander, finely conscious of what each country had to offer. The poetic expression of this twofold loyalty is not a limiting nostalgia, a sense of exile from the one or the other, but an acceptance of both which enriches her awareness of the New Zealand scene'. Baigent (who was a personal friend of Bethell's) justly notes Bethell's two-fold loyalty; O'Sullivan quotes a letter to Sidwick which declares the same point:

'I am by birth and choice English, but I have lived in New Zealand a good deal and shouldn't like to be impolite to it'. But the remainder of Baigent's remark indicates a misreading of her work founded on misunderstandings of the nature both of nostalgia and of exile. Clearly, for Baigent, nostalgia is a limiting, cramping, negative emotion and he is reluctant to admit its presence in Bethell's poetry. Similarly, he construes exile as something akin to alienation, as failure or refusal to adapt. But as Bethell knew from her horticultural endeavours, transplanted plants might settle and grow, but they remained exotic nevertheless. However much Bethell settled and adapted to life in New Zealand, however much she recalled (with equal nostalgia) the rich, full days of her childhood, she always retained some desire to return to England, and she always remained 'by birth and choice English'.

In 1931, Bethell met John Schroder, literary editor at *The Press* (Christchurch). Schroder's review of *From a Garden in the Antipodes* had pleased Bethell, and she was delighted to accept his suggestion that she submit individual poems to his Literary Page. They became regular correspondents, and over the next eight years, twenty-three poems appeared over the initials E. H., gradually bringing her work to wider notice.

In 1934, however, soon after Bethell's sixtieth birthday, the happiness of Rise Cottage came to a shattering end, when Effie Pollen, who had been having severe head pains for a few weeks, had a sudden seizure and died. It was the most devastating event in Bethell's life. She had known Effie for some thirty years. They had lived together first in Hampstead with Bethell's mother and sister, and then together had made this cottage their home, and suddenly, with little warning, the younger woman died, leaving Bethell bereft and utterly bewildered. Bethell seldom had occasion to speak of their relationship, but a letter to Monte Holcroft reveals something of its strength and importance to her. Writing about Pollen's death, she described it as 'a complete shattering of my life; from her, I have had love, tenderness, and understanding ... and close and happy companionship'. Other letters to Eileen Duggan, to Rodney Kennedy, to Monte Holcroft, to John Schroder, to Charles Brasch and to Eric McCormick all speak of the numbing emotional impact of this death, and speak at the same time of the enormous challenge it provided to her religious belief.

In a later letter to Holcroft, she described the relationship as 'prevaillingly maternal' – a bond of mutual protection and support. (The same description occurs in other letters, to John Summers, and to Rodney Kennedy.) It has become increasingly common in recent years to interpret the relationship

between the two women as a lesbian one; Bethell's description of it as 'prevaingly maternal' is read, if not as a deliberate subterfuge, then as a way of explaining physical tenderness between women. There is, of course, no way of knowing for certain what the nature of the relationship between the two women was, and the question is complicated by the debate over whether the term 'lesbian' should be applied only to sexual relationships or more generally to social, celibate relationships. Before dismissing Bethell's description, however, it is worth acknowledging a strongly maternal aspect to her personality. Her educational work naturally involved her with children; she assisted Sir John Hall in the establishment of a Christian boys' club in Christchurch; the social work she undertook in London was predominantly with young people, especially young boys, and waifs and strays; and she even conducted classes in mothercraft. Moreover, letters to Kathleen Taylor (another younger woman for whom Bethell formed a deep attachment after Effie Pollen's death) display a similar mothering tendency. And in a letter to Charles Brasch she wrote of Effie as 'the one who was to me ... all the children I might have had'.

Whatever the nature of their relationship, Effie Pollen's death further affected Bethell in that it made it almost impossible for her to write any further poetry. She confessed in a letter to Eileen Duggan: '*Time and Place* ... is made up of things written about the same time as the Garden pieces – in the same burst of excitement – of joy. ... Now I am a tree struck by lightning – dead. I can think things, but not feel them. One must feel to write. All joy is lost. ... As I wander about these mountain roads I try to pray, and to know that prayers are heard when they seem not to be. It is all pain ... & a sense of failure – I am told that purgatory begins in this world.... You know I think one has to write – about anything – out of faith – great poets may write out of great grief – but faith must impel the little ones. If I could find that again – or even a lively hope instead of a faint one!'

The majority of the poems in the second volume, *Time and Place*, as the letter to Duggan confirms, were written before 1934, but prepared for publication in 1936. They are arranged so as to follow the pattern of the seasons, from spring through to winter, with four poems to each season – an arrangement arrived at with some help from D'Arcy Cresswell – and no doubt the progression from youth to old age, from rebirth to death is a significant reminder of the sense of grief that attended Bethell's last years. Certainly the final poem, 'Envoy', which was written after Pollen's death, springs from such an emotion. It recalls scenes of 'fugitive beauty' upon which night has fallen, and it recognizes its own lines as 'impotent and cold / transcriptions' that are

nevertheless offered as a token of 'thanks for felicity'. But at the same time, it would be wrong to think that these ideas were occasioned wholly by Pollen's death; time and again in the earlier poems of this volume we are reminded of the transitoriness of earthly things. Even the spring poems 'Willows in the Valley' and 'The Long Harbour' are haunted by such notes: the attempt in the latter poem to still the 'fugitive hours' is achieved only through an imaginative identification with the 'dark and daring voyagers' to these islands whose only rest is in death.

O'Sullivan's introduction describes her as the most firmly, traditionally Christian voice in New Zealand poetry, one who writes within the great tradition of Anglican devotional verse, with rhythms and phrases drawn from the Scriptures and the Book of Common Prayer. This is certainly true of some poems in *Time and Place* and, even more so, in *Day and Night*, where poems such as 'At the Lighting of the Lamps', 'The Crucifix', 'Waves', and 'Midnight' deal explicitly with religious subjects. God is hailed as 'Almighty Artificer, Architect;' 'massed clouds' are imagined as 'a marble and alabaster forecourt of the Lord's house', the light of which is 'the Lamb of God;' the poet creates her own *De profundis*, in which her cry is answered by one who calls himself 'the Slain ... the Meaning, the Guerdon;' and poem after poem invokes a 'Spirit of Beauty' who, in 'Night of July', is explicitly identified as the third person of the Trinity.

But it is not always obvious in the 'Garden' poems how regularly she plays with subtle religious allusions. Holcroft suggests the volume is 'mainly secular', with religious references in 'only four of the fifty-four' poems. In fact, at least a dozen or more of the poems can be so read, and they reveal how Old Testament words and phrases were part of her way of saying, from the wish she expresses to be 'one of Eve's daughters', to the acknowledgement of her 'little Raven' (the image derives from the first book of Kings), or seeing herself as the one who 'had sown in tears' in 'Trance'. Like a watchman at daybreak, the poet in 'Trance' rises to gaze upon her garden; its stillness makes it seem enchanted, a dim image 'of a grove laid up in heaven' which is eventually merged with the 'enclosed garden' of Christian tradition.

A favourite device of seventeenth century poets was to link time and the garden. The walled garden became the setting for a meditation on time, on the passage of time, on the mutability of worldly things, and so ultimately the garden became a locus for the meditation *de contemptu mundi*. Bethell picks up on this, widely read as she was in poets such as Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne. Mutability, transience, being fugitive – these words and motifs echo

throughout her poems, offering a reflection on the cycles of nature, but more importantly on the transience of human life. Bethell loves, and lovingly records, the beauty of the natural world, but as she does so she recognises it as a fugitive beauty.

Moreover, she regularly assigns a symbolic value to the trees she writes of: in 'Burke's Pass', the firs are gravestones which publish man's condition; the oft-appearing willow tree, although its new green is a sign of life, can also be emblematic of death; the Irish heather is well suited for graveyards; in 'The Long Harbour', pine-groves 'garrison the burial ground'; and the willows also provide branches for aliens to hang up their harps.

After the death of Effie Pollen, Ursula Bethell sold Rise Cottage and moved closer to the city, taking a flat in the house she had gifted to the Church of England, which had been named St Faith's House of Sacred Learning, and was intended to serve as a centre for training Anglican deaconesses. The Depression had seriously diminished her income, based as it was on family investments, and she was forced to adopt a more modest lifestyle. Indifferent health dogged the next ten years of her life, but she maintained extensive correspondences with a wide circle of friends of all ages, especially young writers and painters.

Although her reputation continued to grow, by 1944 her work was all out of print; she decided that *Time and Place* and *Day and Night* should be reprinted at her own expense. Diagnosed as having an inoperable cancer, she wrote to Baigent asking that he 'put it through fairly quickly, as my time may be short'. Eventually, she was persuaded (by Baigent, Charles Brasch and Allen Curnow) to agree to the preparation of a full collection of her poetry, to be published under her own name. Any anonymity attached to the pseudonym Evelyn Hayes had long since vanished.

The cancer, she reflected to Holcroft, was 'quite a good illness' for it allowed her time to prepare herself for death, which she did without 'regret that we are of ripe years' and without complaining 'of grey hairs and infirmities'. The time for regrets and complaints was over. Ursula Bethell died on January 15, 1945.

Eventually, her *Collected Poems* was published in 1950, which brought together all the poems from the three published volumes, together with a number of other individual poems – a handful that had been published in local papers, a selection from the 'River Ashley' sequence, and the intensely

private group of six 'Memorial Poems' which record, year by year, the anniversary of the death of Effie Pollen. There is no evidence that Bethell consented to the publication of these six poems, nor indeed that they should be thought of as a sequence; while she was alive she sent them out sparingly to a few close friends, and when she sent them to Baigent she noted that they were 'only for yr. eyes ... I was right in thinking them unsuitable'. Rather than seeking to protect or conceal the nature of her relationship with Effie Pollen, Bethell's reluctance to publish them is an effort to protect herself from the conspicuous (and perhaps unseemly) display of grief. To Baigent and to Kennedy in particular she was forthright about the essential privacy of the poems, affirming that she could not show them to anyone who had not been hurt. In certain respects, the 'Memorials' can be considered elegiac: they show an awareness of some of the public and conventional aspects of the genre, such as the direct address to the deceased, the observation of nature's renewal, the belief that nature shares the impulse to mourn. But in many ways they are more personal than conventional, and they lack the achieved consolation that is found in traditional elegiac writing. Rather they are records of her own attempt to come to terms with grief and loss, and records of her failure to do so. These poems are Bethell's 'cries countless, cries like dead letters', and, as with Hopkins's poem, they are addressed to a dearest one 'who lives, alas! away'.

Writing to Eric McCormick in 1940, Bethell denied that she looked back to England 'thru' 'rose-coloured haze' – I look at it through tears, that's all'. She reflected that 'one of the sad things about me [is] I don't belong anywhere in particular. I've dodged to and fro ... I have not been able to settle'. By 1940, Bethell was in her mid-sixties and had lived in New Zealand continuously for sixteen years, but her comment suggests she had not settled in all those years. On the surface, it is another statement of the loss of homeland, but a rather more poignant statement, in that it speaks of a double exile. Baigent found her to be at home in both countries; in fact, she seems here to be at home in neither. But beneath the surface, she appears to be saying something else; she is asserting that she has no home in this world.

In an early poem, 'Elect', the rose 'Pilgrim' is admired for its 'beautiful name'. Other poems celebrate the beauty of roses and their names, but it is particularly the image of pilgrimage that she admires here, and because of its connotations, she refuses to pamper the rose; she plants it in a difficult place, exposed to the east wind. It is fitting that Bethell should admire this pilgrim rose, for the traditional Christian image of life as pilgrimage had a special significance for her. She adopted, as a personal emblem, the scallop shell

traditionally associated with the shrine of St James at Compostella, the symbol so beloved of English pilgrims. The sense of exile that can be discerned in her poetry includes not just the note of expatriation from a loved homeland, but also the traditional idea that, for the *exules filiae Hevae*, life is a journey to another home. Bethell's literary papers include an undated cutting from the *Times Literary Supplement* that expresses a view she must have shared: 'it is precisely because man is not master of his fate, because he is a powerless pilgrim in a mysterious universe ... that art and religion were born. The true poem is always a miracle. It springs, at the right crisis, from the poet's way of life and habit of thought. For a moment he has a vision of overmastering truth and beauty around him'.

The letter to Holcroft in which Bethell declared her devastation after Effie Pollen's death continues with the poignant sentence: 'I shall not want another home on this planet'. It is a striking reminder of how much joy was to be found in the years at Rise Cottage, joy that was perhaps only equalled in the idyllic childhood by the river Ashley. But at the same time it epitomizes the pilgrim's yearning for another home outside of this mysterious universe, beyond a merely fugitive beauty. It is that yearning, captured and stilled for a moment in the miracle that is a poem, that is at the heart of Bethell's poetic experience.

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A collection of Ursula Bethell's manuscripts is held at the Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, New Zealand; principal collections of correspondence are held at the Macmillan Brown Library, at the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, and at the Hocken Library, University of Otago, New Zealand.